

# 10 STORY WESTERN MAGAZINE

10¢

APRIL



TEN FICTION BULL'S EYES!

*FEATURE NOVEL*

## ● GALLOWS GRADUATE

by JOE AUSTELL SMALL

*TWO NOVELETTES*

## ● RAWHIDE AND DYNAMITE

by ART LAWSON

## ● BATTALION OF DEATH

by WILLIAM R. COX

● ROAN ● STEELE ● KETCHUM  
● PEARSON ● STEVENS  
● SMITH ● LANE



# Here's the Greatest BILLFOLD BARGAIN in all America

**Your LODGE Emblem or ARMY or NAVY Insignia  
and Name Engraved in 23K. Gold  
Absolutely FREE**

**Special Introductory Offer**

**\$1.98**

**Rising Costs  
of Leather  
May Make  
It Impossible  
To Repeat  
This Amazing  
Offer!**



**Your Name Engraved Here!**

**Genuine  
Highest**

**Quality Leather  
BLACK CALFSKIN**

**De Luxe VALUE**

**Your FAVORITE Emblem, NAME  
ADDRESS, and Social Security Number  
Engraved in GOLD—FREE!**



This beautiful three-color life-time Identification Plate carries your full name, address and social security or draft number.



**Also FREE**—If you order at once we send you this beautiful Identification Key Tag and Gift Chain to match, hand engraved with your name, address, city and state. Will last a lifetime.

Men:—Here, without a doubt, is positively the greatest Billfold and Pass Case Bargain that you'll be likely to see for a good many years to come. For a high quality Calfskin Billfold, beautifully engraved in gold, with your LODGE Emblem or Army or Navy Insignia and Name, you would expect to pay up to \$4.50 and consider it a marvelous buy. If you take advantage of this sensational introductory offer, you can get this superb genuine Calfskin Wallet and Pass Case for only \$1.98, and we will send you absolutely free a specially designed three color lifetime Identification Plate, which carries your Social Security Number, your Name and Address or your Army Draft Number. This fine grain calfskin Billfold must actually be seen to be fully appreciated. Besides the spacious compartment at the back which can be used for currency, checks, papers, etc., it has four pockets each protected by celluloid to prevent the soiling of your valuable membership and credit cards.

When closed, this handsome Billfold has the soft velvety feel you find only in quality Calfskin. Your LODGE Emblem or Army or Navy Insignia and Initials, are beautifully embossed in 23 karat gold on the face of the Billfold. Due to difficulty in obtaining choice leather because of war conditions, the supply of these Billfolds is limited. Remember if you send your order promptly, we will include absolutely FREE, a beautiful Identification Key Tag and Gift Chain to match, all hand engraved with your Name, Address, City and State. If after receiving your Billfold and Free Gift, you don't positively agree that this is the most outstanding bargain you have ever come across, return them to us and your money will be cheerfully refunded in full. Send your order today. Without fail so you won't be disappointed.

## Rush This Coupon For This Once-In-A-Lifetime Bargain!

**ILLINOIS MERCHANDISE MART,  
Dept. 212-D, 54 W. Illinois St., Chicago.**

If you want a LODGE, ARMY, or NAVY INSIGNIA, state name here. Gentlemen: I enclose \$1.98. Please send me a Genuine Calfskin Billfold with my name and favorite Emblem engraved in 23k gold. Include absolutely free a lifetime Identification Plate carrying my full Name and Social Security Number, or Draft Number. Also include FREE an Identification Key Tag and Gift Chain to match, all hand-engraved with my Name, Address, City and State.

My Full Name ..... (Please print clearly)

Address .....

City ..... State .....

Social Security Number ..... Army Draft Number .....  
Check here if you want us to ship the above C.O.D. for \$1.98 plus a few pennies postage and C.O.D. charges.

**64% Of  
Service Men  
Want This  
Gift!**

In a national survey of service men just completed—64% of all men interviewed, said that a Billfold with the proper insignia, made a swell gift.

**YOUR LODGE EMBLEM OR ARMY OR  
NAVY INSIGNIA HERE**



**YOUR INITIALS  
HERE**



**J. E. SMITH**  
President  
National Radio Institute  
Established 28 Years

# I WILL SEND A SAMPLE LESSON FREE to PROVE I can Train You at Home in Spare Time to BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN

## I Trained These Men



**\$200 a Month in  
Own Business**

"For several years I have been in business for myself making around \$200 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N.R.I. to thank for my start in this field." **AERLIE J. FROCHMAN**, 300 W. Texas Ave., Goose Creek, Texas.



**Lieutenant in  
Signal Corps**

"I cannot divulge any information as to my type of work, but I can say that N.R.I. training is certainly coming in mighty handy these days." (Name and address omitted for military reasons.)



**\$5 to \$10 Week  
in Spare Time**

"I am engaged in spare time Radio work. I average from \$5 to \$10 a week. I often wished that I had enrolled sooner because all this extra money sure does come in handy." **THEODORE K. DUBREE**, Hortham, Pa.

**Extra Pay  
in Army,  
Navy, Too**

Men likely to go into military service, soldiers, sailors, marines, should mail the coupon now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duties. MUCH HIGHER PAY. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. Over 1,700 service men now enrolled.

Mail the Coupon for a FREE lesson from my Radio Course. It shows you how N.R.I. trains you for Radio at home in spare time. And with this sample lesson I'll send my 64-page illustrated book, **RICH REWARDS IN RADIO**. It describes the many fascinating jobs Radio offers; explains how N.R.I. teaches you with interesting, illustrated lessons.

**Act Now! Many Radio Technicians  
Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week**

Right now, in nearly every neighborhood, there's room for more spare and full time Radio Technicians. Many Radio Technicians are stepping into FULL time Radio jobs, or are starting their own shops, and making \$30, \$40, \$50 a week!

Others are taking good-pay jobs with Broadcasting Stations. Hundreds more are needed for Government jobs as Civilian Radio Operators, Technicians. Radio Manufacturers, rushing to fill Government orders, need trained men. Aviation, Police, Commercial Radio and Loudspeaker Systems are live, growing fields. And think of the NEW jobs Television and other Radio developments will open after the war! I give you the Radio knowledge required for jobs in these fields.

**"The N.R.I. Method" Helps Many Make  
\$5, \$10 a Week Extra While Learning**

Many N.R.I. Students make \$5, \$10 a week extra money fixing Radios in spare time while learning. I send EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS that tell how to do it!

I give you thorough training in Radio Theory—show you how to use your knowledge. N.R.I. trains you "from the ground up"—covers Fundamentals thoroughly: Radio Terms, Symbols, Diagrams, Receiver Troubles, Servicing, Television, F.M. Receivers, Transmitters; Cathode Ray Oscilloscopes, Electronic Controls, etc., are just a FEW of the subjects you'll cover before you finish my course!

**Find out What N. R. I. Can do for You**  
MAIL COUPON NOW for FREE sample Lesson and 64-page illustrated book. You'll see the many fascinating jobs Radio offers and how you can train at home. If you want to jump your pay—MAIL COUPON AT ONCE! **J. E. SMITH**, President, Dept. 3DS, National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

**TRAINING MEN FOR VITAL RADIO JOBS**

**This FREE BOOK has Helped Hundreds  
of Men to Make More Money**

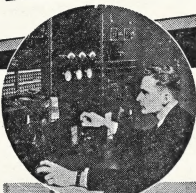
**Mr. J. E. Smith, President, Dept. 3DS  
NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE, Washington, D. C.**

Mail me FREE, without obligation, your Sample Lesson and 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No Salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name ..... Age .....

Address .....

City ..... State..... ZIP-2

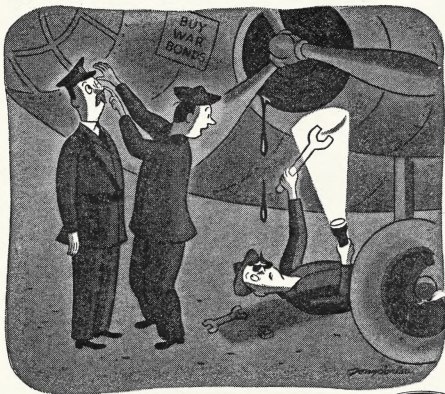


**BROADCASTING STATIONS** (top illustration) employ Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other fascinating, steady, well-paying technical jobs. **FIXING RADIO SETS** (bottom illustration), a booming field today, pays many Radio Technicians \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week extra fixing Radios in spare time.

**Mail Coupon  
Now!**



# ***LIGHTER MOMENTS*** with **fresh Eveready Batteries**



*"Loan me your flashlight willya? The Major's  
got a little something in his eye."*



**FRESH BATTERIES LAST  
LONGER . . . Look for  
the date line** ➔

PRACTICALLY every branch of our fighting forces makes some important use of "Eveready" batteries. There are few for civilians—so use yours only when necessary.

# **EVEREADY**

TRADE-MARK

*The word "Eveready" is a registered trade-mark  
of National Carbon Company, Inc.*



# 10 STORY WESTERN MAGAZINE

NEXT ISSUE  
ON SALE  
APRIL 9TH

VOLUME XXI

APRIL, 1943

NUMBER 1

## 1—Complete Novel—1

- GALLOW'S GRADUATE**.....Joe Austell Small 8  
*Boothill's gates were closed to bullet-riddled and hanged Buck Adams—until he had finished a gun chore for a ranch rodded by ghosts!*

## 2—Feature Novelettes—2

- RAWHIDE AND DYNAMITE**.....Art Lawson 36  
*A graveyard vow decreed that Jim Silver bring the torch, the gun—and the hangrope, if necessary—to the nester home of the girl he loved!*
- BATTALION OF DEATH**.....William R. Cox 82  
*The almighty dollar ruled supreme in the railroad terminus of Los Pesos town—and damn the men who fought and died to build a nation!*

## 7—Short Stories—7

- TROUBLE-SHOOTER'S LAST DRAW**.....M. Howard Lane 26  
*When the payoff came, where would Gunman Link Cottrell's allegiance go: to his life-long dim trail pard—or his own square-dealing conscience?*
- NIGHT OF THE RED SNOW**.....Tom Roan 51  
*Not even the cruel whip of a gold-camp madman could change the deathless loyalty of Prospector John King's four-legged killers.*
- STAR-TOTING KING OF BOOTHILL**.....John G. Pearsol 62  
*Though he lost or won against the human wolves of Painted Rock, Marshal Storm knew his captive button brother must die in outlaw hands!*
- WILD BILL—FIGHTING PLAINSMAN**.....James Stevens 71  
*The curse of a man on the toboggan to hell finally caught up with Bill Hickok—for he had broken the oldest code of the fighting West!*
- SCOURGE OF THE RANGE**.....J. A. Smith 74  
*Little did that wilderness rancher know, as he pulled his carbine's trigger, that his own life would be forfeit for the calf-killing dog he had condemned to die!*
- MR. DEATH—BLACKSMITH!**.....Gunnison Steele 99  
*Bill Abbot was only seventeen, but he had brains—and guts enough—to trade a dead man for five thousand dollars.*
- STRING OUT—FOR HELL!**.....Philip Ketchum 103  
*The creed of the plains told Jim Holden that he must save a wagon train of pioneers from the Indian scourge—then let them lead him to the gallows!*

## Western Feature

- NEW FRONTIERS**.....The Editor 6

THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU



AGAINST REPRINT FICTION!

Published monthly by Popular Publications, 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices, 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary. Harry S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter Sept. 24, 1941, at the postoffice at Chicago, Ill., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Title registration pending at U. S. Patent Office. Copyright, 1943, by Popular Publications, Inc. All rights reserved under Pan American Copyright Convention. Single copy price 10c. Yearly subscription in U. S. A. \$1.20. Foreign postage 75c additional. Subscription Department, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. For advertising rates address Sam J. Perry, 205 E. 42nd St., New York, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts kindly enclose stamped self-addressed envelope for their return if found unavailable, and send to 205 East 42nd Street, N. Y. C. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, although care will be exercised in handling them. Printed in U. S. A.

# NEW FRONTIERS

OUR nation grew to maturity, with the excitement-spiced lure of the wilderness, the uncharted adventure-land of opportunity, just beyond its back door. For generations our trail-breaking forebears have been pitting their strength and knowledge and courage against the trials of the unknown, pushing the frontier on and on in the vanguard of our forward-moving civilization.

It has been a number of years since our last band of war-painted Indians was subdued; the roistering, unruly boom towns of the gold fields are a thing of the past; outlaws no longer lurk among cliff-side rocks overhanging narrow canyon trails, waiting to rob unsuspecting wayfarers. The turbulent, tumultuous days of our early Western frontier are a dramatic, colorful memory.

But pioneering is a basic element of our national makeup that is not lost in a decade or two. And today, on new frontiers, young, vigorous, undaunted Americans are breaking new and dangerous trails to glory.

The air is one of our major 1943 frontiers. Well over two million men, the Secretary of War has announced, will comprise the United States Air Forces that will lay claim to world mastery of the skies. Winged brigands now hold aerial supremacy over certain dark sectors of the globe. Our fighting pioneers of the air must bring them down, smash their bases and, when that is done, patrol this vast new frontier to keep its lanes free from future molestation.

Some authorities tell us that in the world that is coming up all of us will be using airplanes. They will be considered no more a luxury than automobiles were, back in the days before gasoline rationing. They will be stall-proof and spin-proof; they will be capable of ascending straight up, hovering motionless in the air or

traveling well over a hundred miles an hour; it will be possible to land them in a fifty-by-fifty lot or on any flat roof. Driving them, these experts say, will be no more difficult than driving a car.

That's a sample of the progress that can be expected to follow the winning of our 1943 frontiers. The pioneers are up there risking their lives to make such a dream of progress an actuality. Like the trail-breakers of our wilderness, they may be in it for the excitement, the supreme sense of exaltation that comes to a man when he proves himself greater than some fearsome threat that leaves lesser men quivering in their boots—they may be in it for those things as well as for the knowledge that they are fighting for a cause that must win unless all liberty-loving mankind is to be reduced to slavery. Also, whether they realize it or not, they are in it for something else that has more to do with the world after the war than with the combat itself.

Like the West's pioneers, they probably think little and care less about the peacetime progress that is destined to follow in their wake. Today we thrill to their daring exploits, as any generation does to the ringing deeds of its pioneers. And tomorrow, when the new frontier is opened up and made safe, the world will honor them, as it does the pioneers of all time, among history's vanguard of progress.

THE EDITOR.





# 3¢ A DAY HOSPITALIZATION PLAN

**Your HOSPITAL  
and DOCTOR BILLS  
PAID!**

## SICKNESS or ACCIDENT

Don't allow Hospitalization expense to ruin your life savings. Insure NOW at low cost . . . *before it's too late!* The famous North American Plan provides that in case of unexpected sickness or accident, you may go to any Hospital in the U. S. or Canada under any Doctor's care. Your expenses will be paid for you in strict accordance with Policy provisions.

## NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION

One individual or entire family (birth to age 70) is eligible. There is no red tape involved . . . either in enrollment or payment of benefits. Unusual features of the North American Hospitalization Plan are its provisions for Doctor fees and a liberal \$1,000.00 Death Benefit . . . seldom if ever available in ordinary Hospitalization Insurance Policies. Also, as a civilian, you get WAR RISK coverage at no extra charge. For solid, dependable, economical protection North American has won the approval of leading Hospitals and physicians throughout the United States.

## NO AGENT WILL CALL

North American Hospitalization protection is sold direct . . . at a saving to you. The Company is under the supervision of the Insurance Department. Sickness and accident strike suddenly. . . **BE PREPARED!** Over 8,000,000 thrifty-minded persons in this country are already enrolled under the popular "3¢ A Day Plan."

## LIBERAL CASH BENEFITS INCLUDE

Hospital Expenses for Sickness up to **\$540.00**

Hospital Expenses for Accident up to **\$540.00**

Doctor or Surgeon Expenses up to . . . **\$135.00**

Loss of Time from Work up to . . . **\$300.00**

Loss of Life . . . **\$1000.00**

**EXTRA: You get WAR RISK coverage**

And many other valuable benefits including AMBULANCE SERVICE EXPENSE . . . cash payments for PHYSICAL DISMEMBERMENT, etc.

**North American Mutual Insurance Company  
Dept. P03-4, Wilmington, Del.**

Please send me, without obligation, details about your "3¢ A Day Hospitalization Insurance Plan."

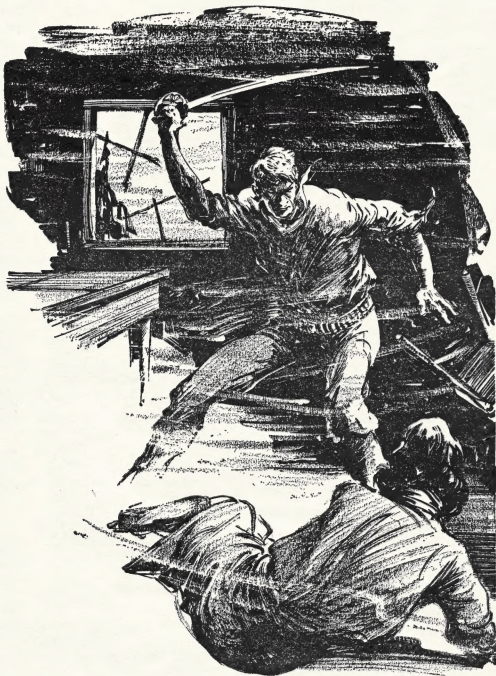
Name .....

Address .....

City..... State.....

(Fill in and clip this coupon. Mail in envelope or paste on penny postcard.)

**RUSH THIS COUPON for BIG FREE BOOK**  
GIVING COMPLETE FACTS



## CHAPTER ONE

### One Way to Hang a Man

**B**UCK ADAMS felt no premonition of danger until the soft *whish* of a singing hemp loop brought him stiffly erect.

He had made a fireless camp there by the Brazos so that no thin curl of blue smoke might betray his presence. A man just didn't ride into the Big Drone range and make himself at home—leastwise, not since Mike Hinch had moved in. If he had any business at the ranch, he rode up via the front gate route, talked fast,



# GALLOWS GRADUATE

*A rousing, swashbuckling action novel of a loyal, hard-to-kill cowboy's fight for a cause long dead*

**By JOE AUSTELL SMALL**



*They jailed him, they filled him full of lead, and they hanged him and left him for dead . . . But Boothill's gates were closed to young Buck Adams—till he'd served out his riding and gunning job on a ranch that had long since ceased to exist!*

The Sword of Victory flashed out blindly. . .

and got to hell out as soon as he was through.

But Buck Adams didn't have that kind of business. . . .

He was sitting under a giant cottonwood, bent slightly forward, cussing Mike Hinch as the direct cause for his coffeeless supper. A sand lizard scuttled across the hot sand, paused and stared at the waddie curiously before darting into a growth of broomweeds. A grasshopper buzzed clumsily past, his wings popping out a loud, drumming rhythm. And in the rustling leaves overhead, a cricket brittled out his sleepy tune. A white crane flew by, twisting his long neck to give the cowboy a mildly interested glance.

It was good to get the stench of that Huntsville prison out of his lungs. It was good to be free again, back in his own home country, breathing the river air, listening to the little river folks talk. And it was good to think of the look that would be on Mike Hinch's face when he stood before Buck at the payoff. . . .

Then suddenly the waddie sat stiffly erect. The smooth sound of a wide loop as it whisked through the air for a long-distance catch was unmistakable. The cowboy was a blurred mist of personified action when the rope tightened around his neck. Jumping up and to the side, Buck twisted his body deftly, landing belly down on the soft sand, both fists filled. He sent two darts of yellow flame into a line of drooping willows that swallowed the other end of the saddle rope. But Buck was shooting at the end of a rope, not at an obvious target.

The new hemp bit into his neck. Dropping one gun, the waddie kicked forward in an effort to gain some slack and free himself with his left hand. But the man handling the other end of that snake-like strip of hemp was no tyro at the game. He kept the rope taut, pulled steadily, dragged Buck over the yielding sand. The waddie's gun continued to flame at an unseen target.

Suddenly the cowboy was smothered by flaying arms and kicking legs. The rope still choked the air from his lungs. Somebody kicked him viciously in the face. A gun barrel crashed down on his head. Darkness crowded in.

Painfully, Buck Adams pulled himself

to a sitting position and tried to brush away the dozen little redskins that were using his head for a war drum. They were there—for he saw them—swimming around in the mist, darting in and out, striking his unprotected head with huge, knotted hickory clubs. And the chief stood before him, grinning evilly.

Slowly the mist faded. A cool river breeze cleared the blackness from Buck's throbbing head. That big chief gradually took on the shape of a rough-jawed, cheek-scarred bull of a white man. Mike Hinch leered down at the waddie and spoke with an accentuated politeness.

"Wal, wal, if it ain't my old friend Buck Adams! Musta got outta the pen a little ahead of time for meek behavior, didn't 'cha, Buck? Whyn't you come around by the front gate, cowboy, 'n let me know a little ahead? Why, man, I'd a-had the table set and some drinks poured!"

The waddie made three attempts before a sound would leave his already swollen throat. "Think I'd rather have it this way." There was deep sarcasm in his voice. "If you'd knowed I was comin', it might of give you time to work out another double-cross for me. But you're still runnin' purty close to color—jumpin' a man from the back!"

A red flush spread over the bull-like man's upper cheeks and the leer shiveled. "We don't take no chances with trespassers, cowboy." Mike spoke slowly and his words carried a hiss. "You'd a-killed our prize roper if he hadn't worked on you from behind the bole of a big pecan tree. We got a nice little game that always amuses our back-door visitors. Boys, let's show old Buck here how it works." Mike Hinch was a master at leering. There was a victorious glint in his eyes.



**A** LANK red-faced henchman grabbed Buck gruffly by the arm, jerked him to a standing position. Another Big Drone drygulcher helped shove him along the sandy river bank to a spot near the water's edge. A hump-shouldered, thin-faced vulture was already rowing a flat-bottomed skiff downstream from its place of concealment under a

growth of drooping willows some hundred yards distant.

"Ain't but three skiffs out on our whole six miles of waterfront. Obliging of you to pick a place so near one of them." There was actually an assumed tone of gratitude in Mike Hinch's voice.

Buck watched the men, his curiosity rising. There was no chance of escape now. The stinging new hemp still hung loosely around his neck. Two men held him firmly. His guns had been taken. There were six fully armed bushwhackers in close range. An attempted break would be suicide.

The thin-faced henchman rowed his boat to a spot directly under an extending limb of the giant cottonwood. The anchor chain, tied to a rough, granite bedrock, showed a depth of perhaps six feet. Buck was shoved roughly into the skiff.

It was one hell of a way to hang a man. Standing there in the boat, bound hand and foot, a noose around his neck and the other end tied to that extending cottonwood limb, Buck knew what the score was before his leering captor spoke.

"We don't hang nobody." There was a patronizing note in Mike's voice. "Of course if that boat would happen to sink, you might have trouble with the rope around your neck. Come to think of it, that skiff needs a good all-over wetting—it's sun-cracked on the sides." The smirking giant drew his hip gun and fired once. A tiny geyser of water spewed up through a small bullet hole in the skiff's bottom.

"Don't worry about the boat, Buck," Mike called out cheerily as he wheeled and rode off in a burst of flying bar sand. "We'll come back in a week and raise it. Couldn't afford to lose a good boat."

Muffled sounds of fading hoofbeats on the soft sand came to Buck dimly as the riders were swallowed by rank bottom growth. A cool river breeze failed to wipe away the sweat on his forehead. The waddie stood there on legs that suddenly felt weak.

He was whipped and he knew it. The boat would fill slowly. It might take ten minutes, it might take twenty. He would be left hanging there. His weight on the limb and a little slack in the rope was just about enough to let him sink knee-deep in the river. And he'd die there, thrashing

the water in a futile attempt to hang onto life. It might be two weeks before his dangling body would be discovered if left undisturbed by Big Drone cowboys. And if somebody did see it, so much the better. It would only add an exclamation point to those "No Trespassing" signs placed around the entire Big Drone boundary.

Rising water now made a gentle boil of the tiny geyser. The frail skiff was now half filled. Buck struggled vainly at the rawhide strips that bound his wrists and ankles. He lowered a sweating chin, raked it to the side, tried to work out more slack in the noose. He might slip his head through it, hobble out of the boat and crawl up the sloping sandy bank under water, holding his breath until he reached dry land. But the rough, prongy hemp with its roper's hondo wouldn't slide. His efforts only tended to further aggravate an already bleeding neck.

The tiny craft shivered slightly and settled another inch. Buck Adams died three deaths during those next four minutes. And just before the last sluggish wallow came, as the little boat shivered and sank, the waddie held back his head and looked upward into the blue of a darkening sky, far beyond the snow-white thunderheads that drifted silently above. Buck asked the Top Range Boss to give him one more chance—just one last try at evening up the score with Mike Hinch.

The young waddie gasped, felt the agonizing pull of the tightening rope. Blood pounded into his head. His breath came in a wheeze. Then it quit entirely. A dark pallor pushed the red from Buck's cheeks. His bound feet kicked out slowly.

It was one hell of a way to hang a man. . . .



THE waddie's next sensation was that of lying flat on his back under a huge waterfall. The icy water was beating into his face, flattening it out pancake-like on the ground. He stirred, sucked air into burning lungs, shook a throbbing head.

The pain was terrific. His breath came in difficult gasps. The cowboy's arms and legs were free now, and his sense of feeling was coming back, but he could not

see. He felt muddy sand and water as his groping hands reached out to brush away the darkness. The waddie sat up finally, brushed grit-coated hands across his burning eyelids. And then the light came in circling, drumming, evasive throbs.

Buck Adams was alive again!

His neck was stiff. It burned and ached. He wanted to vomit. His throat was sore, choked. He turned with a start to look behind him, realizing fully for the first time that someone had cut him down. Even as he turned, a horse and rider melted into a thick growth of sunflower weeds, riding fast. It was like a mirage. Buck thought he saw a small man hunched forward on a light lemon-colored palomino. A moment later the cowboy wasn't sure that he had seen anything at all. But things seemed a little unreal to him right now. The red welt on his neck glowed and burned like a band of liquid fire. Even his head ached.

However, a few outstanding facts were there to be seen. The rope had been cut by a rider who had waded his horse out into the river. The animal's footprints led in and out of the water. The noose had been taken from around his neck. And that strong hemp had been cut with one hell of a sharp knife. No sawing, hacking, or repeated attempts to slash it in two—just one clean swing. Buck knew it had been severed in one swipe, because the tiny rope hairs were cut evenly.

But the waddie didn't have time to sit there and think. He wanted that strand of rope still dangling from the cottonwood limb. If the Big Drone drygulchers came back, Buck wanted them to think he was done for. They would figure, perhaps, that some old riverman, or a Negro fisherman had taken the cowboy down—dead. Right now he wanted to leave that particular spot fast, keep out of sight, and later deal out his own hand to Mike Hinch.

Without a horse Buck Adams felt naked. The Big Drone renegades had taken his old club-footed sorrel. And he had been relieved of his hip guns just as he was beginning to get used to wearing them again. What remained of his meager outfit, bought with money borrowed from a friend in Bryan, had been kicked in the river or stolen by the hanging party. A dead man, Mike Hinch had thought,

would have no need for even a meager trail outfit.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Wild Man of the River

IT WAS hard going in the thick river-bottom undergrowth. The bare-headed, sandy-haired cowboy fought the green vines and stinging thorns, working steadily up to higher ground, his mind pondering over a miraculous delivery from the vaults of death. Things like that just didn't happen. There had to be a cause. It was the first break that had come his way since the high-handed rail-roading dealt him when Mike Hinch moved in on the Big Drone.

Old Ben Moses had been a good boss, and the Big Drone was a good ranch. What more could a waddie ask for?

But then Mike Hinch had ridden up to the front gate one morning and asked to see old Ben. When that little conference was over, the Big Drone ramrod was a changed man. His face was bloodless, there was a deep, haunting fear in his eyes.

Mike and his four riders had moved in. Two weeks from that date the unhaven bull of a man had been made foreman. He ran the ranch from then on, forcefully, brutally, with ever increasing authority. And old Ben Moses kept quiet.

The old hands were worried. They had all but begged Ben to let them send Mike and his four henchmen on their way, dodging little bursts of sand made by flying bullets; but Ben would only shrug his shoulders and look out across the mellow range, a hollow glint in his tired old eyes.

It wasn't until Buck had confronted Jennie, asking her bluntly what hold Mike had on Ben, that he fully realized just how serious things really were. The girl, who who been receiving his increasing attentions during the past three months with laughing brown eyes and a song in her voice, shook her head and cried softly.

"Father's in danger, Buck," she had said, with a hush to her voice and tears in her eyes.

Buck Adams had stomped out of the ranchhouse that day with one resolution



in his heart—to get Mike Hinch and his hairy buzzards off the ranch if it took a bullet in the big man's guts to do it.

But Mike didn't get a bullet in his guts. Instead, Buck got a year and a half in the Huntsville State Prison for supposedly knocking one of Bryan's most prosperous merchants, old Jesse Sommers, in the head and taking \$900 in greenbacks off his hip. The money had been found on Buck and a witness appeared who saw him do it. All Buck remembered was taking a drink of damned funny tasting rye.

But it wasn't until a fixed judge had sent him to prison for a year and a half that Buck realized just how well Mike was getting along with the law element in Brazos County. Since that day, the

buzzards, merciless, cold-blooded cut-throats in their own right.

On his way up to higher ground Buck paused briefly at the old willow spring to wash a swallow of cool water down his burning throat. It eased the pain somewhat.

The waddie stood there, studying his reflection in the clear, limpid water. The image that stared back at him, wriggling grotesquely with the gyrations of the rippling water, looked no more than twenty-six years of age. He was bareheaded. Unruly sandy hair that had a tendency to curl flayed out wildly over his forehead. A pair of well proportioned shoulders topped a lanky, tall frame. There was the hint of wiriness, muscled elasticity to that frame—as if, bent double, the long,

---

**NEXT MONTH—A remarkable new novel of swift and smashing action down in the Mexican Border country—a great story by Fred Gipson, whose salty tales of the Old Southwest have won him wide acclaim as Texas's leading writer—will be featured in May 10 STORY WESTERN. Be sure to get a copy and read "Hell Is Where You Find It!"**

---

**On Sale April 9th**

---

waddie had lived for the hour when he would again breathe the river air a free man.

The easy going, likable cowboy had cut his time nearly in half with good behavior. Immediately, then, he had made for Bryan and his friend Jim Bell.

"A lot has happened down there on the Big Drone during the nine months you been gone." Old Jim had leaned over a worn counter and talked slowly, deep warning in his voice. "I hear they've taken the law into their own hands. Ben Moses' ranch is sort of a kingdom in its own now, run by a son of the Devil himself. Sure, I'll stake you to an outfit, son—but I wouldn't go within a day's ride of the Big Drone. It ain't safe. There's strange things happenin' on that ranch."

◆ ◆ ◆

**B**UCK felt a little weak right now, and it made the ordeal ahead seem all the more impossible—one lone puncher against a rookery of sharp-billed

powerful body would snap out straight again of its own accord.

Second-hand chaps nestled a little too snugly to the brown ducking breeches that were slightly too long. The cowboy boots were old but serviceable. Jim Bell's stock of clothes in Buck's particular size had been limited. Two guns which had hung low on his thighs were missing. So was the bright blue neckerchief. These articles had been stripped away by those sneaking hoodlums.

As he stood surveying himself on the mirror-like surface, Buck was subconsciously weighing the chances of that flickering shadow in the crystal pool against cunning human savagery, cold steel and lead, and the might of sheer numbers. It made him a little weak to think ahead that way.

Buck labored up the side of a slight pinoak-covered rise and stopped short on the crest. Strange sounds came from a winding, brush-choked draw to the east. The waddie spotted a hatless rider bending forward in the saddle, riding furiously.

A blue cotton shirt-tail whipped the wind at his back. Long, stringy brown hair rose and fell as the horse labored through the thick, stunted growth. Half-way up the draw, the horseman turned in his saddle and fired back at his unseen pursuers. He leaned forward again then and rode grimly.

From the scattered growth of sandhill blackjacks, hardly a hundred yards behind the lone rider, four horsemen burst into view, riding madly. The set of their shoulders, the way they worked their tired horses, showed that these men were on an important mission. They meant to carry it out.

Buck Adams crouched behind a fallen pinoak bole and watched with increasing interest. This wasn't his fight, and he meant to stay out of it. He would lie low, hide among the dead branches of the pinoak, and let the riders pass.

The lone horseman burst from a growth of yaupon and coaxed his horse desperately. He would pass within yards of the fallen pinoak. The rider was staring straight ahead now, his face a strange contortion of apprehension and excitement. It was old Gabe Watson of the Big Drone, one of the cow hands from the good old days.

"Gabe!" Buck rose suddenly from his place of concealment and waved at the oncoming rider.

"Remember the Alamo!" old Gabe cried out hoarsely. "The damned greasers are charging! Hold the fort, boys! I'm a-comin' to help out!"

The old cowman swung off his lathered horse and dived behind the fallen pinoak. "Fire when they hit that grassy glade, youngster!" he yelled at Buck. "Shoot 'em down like greasy swine!" The old man had grabbed a battered carbine from its saddle sheath when he quit the panting roan and was now getting into position for action.

"I'm gunless, Gabe!" Significantly, Buck eyed a hip gun the old man carried. "Who's after yuh?"

"Hinch men!" The old fellow glanced at Buck wildly, unbuckling his cartridge belt and throwing it at the cowboy. "They're gonna kill me—kill us all!" He sighted down the short carbine quickly as the first rider burst into view and fired.

A tuft of grass and sand volcanoed a foot high fully ten yards to the left.

"Take it easy, Gabe," Buck warned. "You're excited. I ain't never seen you miss that far before."

"Shoot them damned yellar-bellied cut-throats!" the old man cried wildly. "Don't let 'em take the fort!"



BUCK glanced apprehensively at old Gabe and then gave his undivided attention to the task at hand. Four riders were stretched out across the grassy glade now, preparatory to hitting a gentle upsweep at the head of the draw.

A bullet bit viciously at the old pinoak a bare yard from Buck's head. Another plowed up an angry gash in the sand behind him. The cowboy fired slowly, deliberately. He saw one rider go down, his mount swinging wildly to the side.

Gabe was working the lever on his carbine feverishly now. One of his bullets took effect. It made a soft splutting sound as it gutted the lead rider's mount. Both horse and rider went down in a burst of flying sod. The remaining two came on, their guns flaming.

A screaming bullet careened off a small sapling and left a dark stain on Gabe's right arm. The old man glanced at it quickly and snorted like a brahma bull caught in a barbed wire fence.

"Jest nipped me, you damned mangy buzzards! Bring 'em on—the whole brown-bellied Mexican army! I'll cut their tonsils out one by one with my bowie!"

The old man hunched forward again, firing rapidly.

It was too much for that trailing candidate-for-a-lead-bath when the rider directly ahead of him grabbed his stomach, bowed over, and slid out of the saddle. The remaining roughneck wheeled his horse sharply and rode back. He picked up his riding mate, who was just recovering from a hard fall. They melted into the blackjacks, riding double.

Buck turned then and regarded the old man soberly. "Gabe," he spoke slowly, "what's wrong with you?"

The light of battle melted gradually from Gabe's eyes. A twinkle of pseudo-

recognition replaced the wild kill glint.

"I know yuh now, son!" He spoke with glad conviction. "You're Gen'l Travis. How'd yuh escape the massacre, Gen'l? Shhh!" he pressed a bony finger to wrinkled lips. "Them Mexicans might hear yuh. The silly devils think they got yuh. But we'll get 'em yet, Gen'l! We'll drive rusty bullets through their bellies, scalp 'em like they's bloody Indians! Say, Gen'l—" the old man leaned forward and spoke with a hush to his voice—"got a chew o' brown weed on yuh? Pa'd whup my tail if he'd catch me chewin', but yuh won't tell 'im, now will yuh, Gen'l?"

Buck sat there staring at the old man, his mind racing. "It must have been bad, Gabe—mighty bad. I'm glad you hung on, though. The boss and Jennie needed you, needed us all. I just wish you weren't too far gone to tell me about a few things back there at the ranch." Buck's eyes followed the old man as he sank to the leaf-covered ground, exhausted. Almost immediately he was asleep.

"I'll even the score for you, Gabe." There was a glint in the waddie's eyes. "A certain hombre will pay, all right—pay with his dirty, rotten, greasy neck."

Buck grabbed old Gabe's short carbine and made a hurried descent into the draw. In the scattering post oak brush he found two dead men, one disabled horse, and two unhurt mounts. He should be able to scrape up an outfit from that—a sort of trade for the horse and provisions the Big Drone men had robbed him of little more than an hour before.

The wounded animal was struggling weakly. A mercy bullet in the forehead put an end to its torture. One horse had disappeared completely, but Buck found the big bay grazing nervously in a little mesquite grass glade farther down the draw. He caught the animal with some difficulty and mounted. Then a short search disclosed the whereabouts of the two dead bushwackers. Buck took their guns and buckled one on each hip. He'd need artillery, plenty of it, later.

For the first time since he had heard the warning *whish* of that hemp rope, Buck Adams felt the pulse-quickening fire of light running through his veins again. A good horse under a waddie and two guns hanging from his sides made a

difference. With that sort of edge, a man wasn't whistling in the dark.

A huge, drowsy sun dipped low in the west. Buck would just about have time to bury the two unfortunate gunmen and work back up the ridge to Gabe before dark. He had made sure not to leave the old man a gun for fear the poor fellow might wake up and start shooting.

It made the waddie feel queer inside to realize that Gabe didn't recognize him. They had ridden side by side for seven years on the Big Drone range. Gabe had remained loyal to the ranch and its owner through a bath of hell.

And just what had finally caused Gabe to pull stakes? But he'd find that out in time. Right now Buck felt a strange exultation. He had tasted first blood on his vengeance trail.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Night Prowler

OLD GABE WATSON stirred awake as Buck rode up. He rubbed bloodshot eyes.

"Let's drag on over to Thimble Canyon, Gabe." The waddie talked matter-of-factly, as if they were riding the range together back in the old days. "Them jokers jumped me for a necktie party before I got half started on an early supper. Swiped me clean. Notice you haven't got a thing to eat in your saddle bags. I'm starved. It's risky, but we're gonna kill us somethin' to eat and cook it—even if it's only a little fuzzy-tail."

For the first time in years Buck Adams ate rabbit. It not only satisfied a gnawing hunger, but the roasted meat tasted downright good. Old Gabe ate heavily, leaned back against the bole of a canyon back-berry and fixed the waddie with troubled eyes. Buck rolled a smoke and talked quietly. He recounted experiences they had shared on the range, talked of pleasant nights in the bunkhouse, and told some of the old jokes. That wild light slowly seeped from the old man's eyes. A frown, born of deep thought, wrinkled his forehead.

"Buck," he said at last, "the Big Drone is going to hell." He dropped his head, pressed two fingers and a slightly trem-

bling thumb to his temples. "I haven't been feeling right lately. Get all bawled up when there's a spell of excitement. Mike Hinch hit me over the head 'bout a month ago with his gun. Nearly killed me. I tried to put a bullet in his guts. They've kept me boxed in, ever since. Fed me a little stinkin' cornbread and water once a day. Jennie slipped me some decent food whenever she could. I busted out, though—lit a shuck when most o' the buzzards was away. Grabbed me a hoss and some artillery. But four buzzards trailed me. They'd nearly caught up and started shootin'. I don't remember much more then." Old Gabe's eyes were fixed, staring into the dim, flickering campfire.

"I'm gonna get 'em, though, Buck—get 'em for what they've done to old Ben Moses and his gal, for what they've done to you an' me an' the others. They've all moved out, Buck—the old hands. I was the last to leave. But I'm goin' back—gonna ride back shootin'. I'll kill every mangy gunslinger on the ranch if I die doin' it!"

The wild light was creeping back to those tired eyes. Colorless lips parted over tobacco-stained teeth as the old man voiced his vows. He started pounding a worn boot with bare fists.

Buck moved forward and grasped his arm, talked to him gently. The wild light faded slowly. Gabe closed his eyes, slumped forward. He slept soundly. Buck sat there for a while and gazed at the game old battler. What hell old Gabe undoubtedly had seen during the last thirty days! Right now a good rest would do him good. In the morning perhaps he would strike a rational period again. Buck wanted to know more about what to expect at the ranch before actually starting his campaign. Right now he needed a little sleep himself. He lay there for a while, thinking. Who had that rider on the palomino been? Why had he saved Buck's life?



**I**T COULDN'T have been more than an hour later when Buck Adams was roused by a stirring of leaves in the deep dark of Thimble Canyon. The fire

still glowed dully, sent a thin curl of smoke into the dark blue. With a start, Buck realized that Gabe was gone—roan horse, saddle, rifle, the remaining half of a roasted rabbit, everything that was a part of the old man's outfit. Sudden fear gripped the cowboy. Had Gabe gone back to the ranch? If so, he would arrive in the dead of night, would almost certainly be killed by one of the guards Mike Hinch would have posted around the place.

A slight rustle of leaves at his back threw Buck instantly on the alert. Half crawling, half sliding, he melted into the dark shadows that surrounded the tiny cleared spot of solid rock on which they had camped. There he remained still, listening, well hidden among the dark shadows.

A drowsy moon sprayed a deceptive mist over the few clearings in the canyon. And it soon became apparent that the carefully moving shadow was exploring these clearings one by one. It was now slowly, painstakingly stalking a miniature rock sink. And the mysterious night visitor would pass within arm's reach of where Buck crouched.

Heavy muscles flexed in the waddie's legs. His body tensed. Like a supple mesquite sapling released from a double bend, Buck leaped. His adversary was taken completely by surprise. They went to the ground in a sprawling heap. Buck pinned both of his struggling visitor's arms solidly to the body in a tight hug. He closed a grasping hand around the neck.

It was a small, tender neck. Buck's hand had reached it in time to choke off a startled exclamation. The body he held in a tight squeeze was soft, yielding, like a roll of matted cobwebs in his grasp.

Sudden realization came to Buck Adams. It was a woman who lay there gasping in his arms.

"Gabe?" the girl called out hopefully when he released his hold.

"Jennie!" Buck exclaimed. "It is you, isn't it, Jennie?"

"Oh, Buck . . . Buck!" The girl's voice melted into a sob. "I'm so glad you're still all right!"

"Let's move out into the clearing," Buck suggested, helping the girl to her feet. "There's a lot goin' on 'round here

I ought to know about." He smiled down at her warmly. "Gal, you're gonna do some tall talking now!"

The girl had made her night ride in an attempt to help old Gabe. The old man had been rational only during quiet moments since his scrape with Mike Hinch. Tremor came to the girl's voice as she related the story.

Two riders had returned, telling of an ambush by the old man, of a narrow canyon where one man could hold off dozens, of a stiff fight, two dead *compadres*, and of wounding Gabe seriously before giving up the fight on account of darkness. If he had been wounded seriously, the girl knew Gabe wouldn't ride far. And she knew the rendezvous he would select. No better hiding spot was available on the entire Big Drone ranch than Thimble Canyon. So she had come with food and bandages to look for the old cowhand and see if she could help him.

"The boys got sort of mixed up on their story," Buck enlightened the girl. "There wasn't no narrow canyon, old Gabe was only scratched, and they turned

tail and quit while there was still plenty of light. Me an' Gabe hid out here. I woke up a few minutes ago, though, an' found him gone. 'Fraid he's gone back to mix it with Hinch."

A worried frown creased the girl's forehead. "He will surely wait until dawn to do anything. I'll be back before then and will try to stop him. It's been like this for months now. We are always in deadly fear."

"Why, Jennie?" There was an impatient tone to the cowboy's voice. "I've been left in the dark about this thing long enough. I've risked my life—"

"I know, Buck," the girl cut in. "I didn't know the whole story until after you were taken away. If Dad had it to do over again, I think he would tell the boys and take the consequences. But now that they are gone and the stakes are so high. . ."

She talked on quietly. The story unraveled slowly. Old Ben Moses had killed a man in Montana. It hadn't been an accident, not even self-defense. He had just got furiously angry, lost his head, and

**For quick, smooth shaving you're all set  
With thrifty, keen-edged Thin Gillette,  
The longest-lasting low-priced blade!  
Your face feels fit and looks top-grade!**



Produced By The Maher  
Of The Famous Gillette  
Sole Blade



**Easy Way To Get Even More Shaves With Every Gillette Blade**



**1. WASH FACE** thoroughly with hot water and soap to soften beard and eliminate accumulated grit that dulls shaving edges



**2. APPLY LATHER** or Brushless Shaving Cream while face is wet. If lather is used, dip your brush in water frequently



**3. TWO EDGES** double blade life. Works indicated above identify edges, enabling you to give each second one and get entire shaven



**4. CLEAN BLADE** in razor by loosening handle, then rinsing in hot water and shaking. Wiping the blade is likely to damage the edges



shot a man. Then he'd cleared out, taking his pigtailed daughter along with him. The law was still in hopes of running across Ben Moses for that murder. And, if found, he would swing on the end of a rope.

Mike Hinch had run across what the law had missed—a slim-chance lead that had left him sitting a black Morgan horse that morning in front of the Big Drone ranchhouse. Hinch and four other rough-necks had taken over after an hour's session with old Ben Moses. The terror of the long, hard trail from Montana, with a little girl on his hands, constantly on the dodge, still weighed heavily on old Ben's mind. And the uneasy, oppressive ten years following had left their mark on him. He had lived in constant fear of a silver star, a marshal's badge.

So Mike Hinch, who was the only living witness of that Montana shooting, had moved in on the Big Drone. At first, the stakes were comparatively small. If old Ben would make him foreman, give his men jobs, and cut him in on fifteen per cent of the profits, Mike Hinch would be quiet. But as the grinning, scar-marked gun-maverick gradually got a tighter hold on the old man's fear-crazed mind, the stakes rose, the iron hand ruled with greater force, wider power.



OLD BEN hadn't told his daughter about that shooting. He had hoped to bury that misstep of his past in the deep recesses of the Rockies, to start a new life on a new ranch in the lush, grassy draws of the Brazos River bottoms.

Even after Mike Hinch had shown his hand, the old man had kept silent. Jennie hadn't known what was behind the hollow stare in her father's eyes, the weight on those drooped shoulders. And the pleading anguish in the old man's eyes, when he finally had broken down and told the story to his daughter, the fear in his heart, had kept the girl silent.

The county law had been mud in Mike's hands. He could squeeze it into whatever form might suit his taste.

Then, when Mike had shown a sadistic streak, had worked cruelties on the old

ranch-hands that no man could stand, Jennie had begged her father to act. He had threatened to bring in the rangers then, run Mike off his property.

The big foreman had grinned narrowly and spoken with confidence. "Guess you know who they'd take back with them, Ben—after they find out who you are." Then he had glanced appraisingly at Jennie and drawled, "Then, too, you want your daughter there to be safe, don't you, Ben?"

The stakes had been too high for Ben Moses. With this new threat hanging over the old man's head, Mike had risen to full authority. He hired new gunmen, heaped hardships and cruelties upon the old hands until they quit one by one. The boys had begged Ben to let them have a showdown with Mike and his roughnecks, but always there was the fear in those tired old eyes, the swift order for them not to take any action against his tormentors.

After most of the old hands had cleared out, reworked brands began to appear among the Big Drone cattle; trespassers were barred from the ranch—on the threat of death. Mike worked at the expense of Ben's good name. Neighboring ranchers began losing cattle. Old Ben Moses was the last man in the county they would accuse of rustling. So Mike Hinch had waxed fat, bringing in rustled cattle, declaring himself in on fifty per cent of the profits, running the ranch to suit himself.

That's the way it had been since Buck had left. The girl paused in her breathless recounting of past events, a new fear in her eyes.

"Buck, you can't fight Mike and his men alone. He'll kill you—like he tried to this afternoon."

"So it was *you* who cut me down! I might have guessed!" The cowboy smiled his thanks. "But why did you run off? Why didn't you wait and—"

"I want the blood of no man on my hands, Buck—especially yours." The girl looked frankly into his eyes. "I thought perhaps after a near-hanging you might decide to turn back, to leave the Big Drone to its own fate. After all, I wasn't so sure just how much it meant to you after these months and the things that

have happened. I wanted you to make up your own mind, Buck."

"I made up my mind about everything a long time ago," the cowboy answered. "I'm going back with you now."

"Not now!" Jennie's voice rose in concern. "You can't face them alone, Buck. Stay here. I'll do what I can for Gabe, and ride back tomorrow at noon. I've written for the rangers already. I asked that they come tomorrow at dusk. Everybody will be in off the range at that time, and we'll have a showdown once and for all. We can't go on like this. Dad's got to face that charge. In the long run, I believe it will prove the lesser of two evils. I'll need you tomorrow, Buck, more than I have ever needed anyone. Anything can happen. So stay here until I ride back."

"But you—they might—"

"I'll be safe." The girl's eyes danced a little. "Look." She rose swiftly and turned her left side to the cowboy. A long silver sheath hung from her slim waist.

"Thought I bumped into some metal when I ambushed you back there in the woods," Buck grinned.

"It belonged to my grandfather," the girl explained. "He gave it to dad. Granddad carried this in the Civil War. He called it the 'Sword of Victory'. Maybe it's silly, but I don't like guns. In a sense, I grew up with this old sword. I learned to use it and I've kept the blade sharp. It cut the rope that was slowly choking you to death. Lately I have worn it whenever I'm out of the house. It might come in handy sometime."

Hardly had the last word rolled out of her mouth when the girl drew close, stood on tiptoe, and kissed him firmly on the lips. She was gone then, a shadow that moved swiftly, a voice that called lightly, "Tomorrow at noon!"

Buck Adams stood there long after her footfalls had melted into the darkness. She was mounting her horse now, riding into the night. A sort of glow was spreading slowly over the cowboy. He could still feel the soft grace of her touch, the warmth of her lips. He wanted to kick up his heels in delight, to yell long and loud, make the echoes ring gloriously against those canyon walls.

Buck Adams guessed, by God, that he was hopelessly in love. . . .

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Death's Line Camp

ABOUT eleven o'clock the next day, Buck climbed cautiously up a rugged break in the canyon wall, shaded his eyes, and studied the surrounding country. He smoked incessantly. It was making him ringy, sitting around all the morning on his tail, his mind running wild over past events, future probabilities, and concern for three people on the Big Drone.

To the east, Brazos County fell away in a broad sweep of wide meadows, wood patches dotting the terrain in checker-board fashion. Low rolling hills and long timber-flanked creeks wound their way through the earth like huge, hairy snakes.

From the head of Thimble Canyon, Buck could follow a network of brushy draws, creeks and dry gulches right up to the Big Drone's back door. And there the fun would start. The cowboy glanced impatiently at the towering sun.

He had missed guessing the correct time by that old sun about thirty minutes a number of times, even an hour once, but after he had been atop that lookout for an estimated two hours and had scanned the line of approach a thousand times, Buck determined to ride. Jennie was an hour late. Noon, she had said. It was one o'clock now, at the very least.

Buck rode the familiar range with keen eyes searching the trail ahead, his sense of danger keenly on the alert. His restlessness had grown to deep concern when the girl failed to show up. Something was wrong. She would be needing help.

Reining in his mount at the head of a shallow wash, Buck dismounted and painfully climbed a tall oak. Sight of the ranch-house brought a pang of nostalgic gladness to his heart. But the surrounding grounds were bare of activity. Somehow, things were just too quiet.

Suddenly the cowboy tensed. His eyes had failed to catch it at first. That shadow on the front porch was not sharp, just a heavier dark among myriad shadows. It

wouldn't be old Ben. He never sat that way, with a rifle over his knees.

The waddie climbed down and moved stealthily toward the ranchhouse, circling to approach from its blind side.

Buck guessed he was slipping some. In the old days he'd never have allowed that guard a shot at him. As it was, his heels scraped a tiny mound on the hard-packed alkali soil surrounding the elongated porch. The jumpy guard wheeled suddenly. Buck didn't hesitate. He went for the bone-handled .44 on his left hip.

But the rifle was already pointing his way as it lay across the gunman's knees. A hairy finger was resting on the trigger. The gun had only to be jerked up and to the left slightly. A long, angry scar ripped across the hardwood boards within inches of Buck's face. Little slivers of wood dug into his cheek. A toothpick-like splinter buried itself in a slanting drive under the waddie's skin. Blood trickled down his face.

Then Buck's own gun kicked the palm of his left hand, and a peculiar expression blotted out that surprised look on the gunman's face. He seemed actually to be smiling at the cowboy. The slug had found its mark. It was pain and shock that pulled the muscles tight in those widening lips.

As the man fell, Buck ducked back behind the corner of the rambling old ranchhouse and waited for results. But there was no sound of excited voices, no thud of running hobnailed boots. All was quiet save a clatter of dishes in the kitchen. In another moment he had crept inside and paused beside the open kitchen door, both fists filled.

"Come on out," he called. "I got you covered!" It was an attempt to draw action, force a quick play.

"Yessah! I'se comin'! Don't shoot, suh! I ain't botherin' nobody!"

"Sam!" the cowboy exclaimed. "You black, food-murdering son-of-a-maverick! What's happening here?"

"Mr. Buck! Lawd, man—I nevah thought these old eyes 'ul see yo' face agin! Dey got 'im, Mr. Buck, dey done got ol' boss!"

"What do you mean, Sam?" A deep fear dug an empty feeling in Buck's stomach.

"Kill 'im wif a steer horn, Mr. Buck. I seen it, but dey doan know I seen 'um an' I doan let on none. Driv it through his belly, Mr. Buck, an' dey took Miss Jennie an' gone. Ol' Hinch found out 'bout Miss Jennie callin' fo' de rangers. I hear 'im say he gonna make her marry 'im. She doan know 'bout her father yet, Mr. Buck. Dey all at the mesa line camp—"

Buck waited to hear no more. He dashed out of the house with a new fear eating into his innards.

"I'm heading for the mesa, Sam!" he threw back over his shoulder. "When the rangers show up, send them on!"



SOMETHING had forced the girl's hand, had caused her to divulge the secret of the coming rangers. And Mike Hinch was working fast. A trumped-up murder, done so that it would look like an accident, then a hurried retreat to the mesa line camp, with all but one of his force to guard it—it was good strategy. Mike would stay there until he married the girl, whether the rangers showed up at the ranch or not.

It was a play against time. If Mike could get a justice of the peace out to that line camp in time, he would stand clear. Already, Buck was sure, he had threatened Jennie with the life of old Ben if she didn't marry him. She would believe it too, probably submit, and then they would ride back to the ranch to find her father dead—gored by an angry steer, Mike would tell her. If the rangers were there, they would have to deal with a new co-owner of the Big Drone—by right of marriage. They couldn't very well throw him out then!

It was a neat plan—one of the neatest Buck had ever run into. Wrinkles deepened on the puncher's forehead as he rode. He was one man against at least a dozen. He didn't have a chance. Mike had left one of his henchmen at the ranch to stall the rangers, ward off any other danger to Mike's plan. The guard had been jumpy. He'd had a Winchester across his knees. Certainly not for the rangers. Then why? And where was old Gabe? They had probably quieted the old man for good by now.

Unanswerable questions drummed at the cowboy's brain. Had the rangers received Jennie's message? Would they come at dusk? That would be too late now. What little good one or two rangers could do against Mike's cutthroats probably wouldn't matter one way or the other, anyway, in the long run. The stakes were high. Mike wouldn't hesitate to kill and totally destroy all traces of them if he had to.

Buck didn't know the answers to these questions. He just knew that Mike Hinch had Jennie Moses out there on the low mesa in the north pasture line camp. And completely around the mesa's rim would be a grim line of death. Twelve men could line the mesa effectively, make of it a fortress. Mike had at least that many left. How one cowboy could be expected to buck such odds Buck didn't know. He quit thinking, rode on grimly. It was better that way.

He was not expecting an outlying guard on that trail from the ranch. But Mike hadn't taken any chances. There was a sudden command to lift 'em, then a quick blow on the head for safe measure, and the cowboy was rendered powerless.

Buck had worried about breaking through that ring of steel, getting inside where he could help Jennie. He didn't have to worry now—one of Mike's men brought him to the line camp, draped limply across his shoulder! Ten minutes later, sitting on the floor with his back propped up against the cabin wall, Buck Adams swore bitterly to himself.

Jennie looked at him and smiled courageously.

"Looks like things are sort of breakin'

my way, cowboy," Mike said to Buck. "I sent another man back to the ranch to stall off them rangers. And this time I'm gonna see personally that you get put out of the runnin'. You been givin' me too much trouble lately." The hard gray eyes showed grim intent. Mike directed an apprehensive glance out the window. "That danged justice oughta be showin' up pretty soon." He grinned at Buck as if enjoying a huge joke. "I want you to see the marryin', cowboy!"

Sudden anger flushed the waddie's cheeks. He strained on the tight raw-hide thongs. Jennie looked at him helplessly.

From the trail below, a cry suddenly stung the languid air into vibrant electricity. Static stillness followed. Then it came again, wild, loud and piercing, touched with triumph, ringed with the wail of a maniac.

"Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad! Sicamuree, you dirty blood hounds!" Old Gabe Watson was on the prod. . . .

◆ ◆ ◆

A DARK mask of concern swept across Mike Hinch's face as he rushed out the door and ran thirty yards down the mesa rim to his nearest sentry. Mike wanted an explanation.

Mike's two prisoners were alone in the cabin then.

"I haven't had a chance to tell you before." The girl talked fast. "Old Gabe didn't ride back to the ranch at all. Instead, I think he rode to the neighboring ranches. He talked often of doing this,



gathering up all the old hands and having a showdown with Mike. When the boys saw what Mike has done to old Gabe, I'm sure they would all want to be in on the showdown!"

"So that's why the guard was jumpy! Mike didn't know what to expect from a loosed wrangler on the loose. . . . I'm bound too tight to move a muscle." There was new hope in Buck's voice. "But you can move, Jennie. Reach in my shirt pocket and get a match. I'm gonna show you how to burn them bindings around your wrists. We've got to knock out the men guarding that east rim. They'll murder the boys one by one as they work up the slope!"

"I made a bust, Buck." The girl permitted a guilty look to flush her cheeks slightly. "Mike was trying to force dad into an out-and-out rustling partnership on a big-scale basis. It was the first time Mike had ever hit him. I couldn't stand it. I flew all to pieces, blew up, told Mike he'd be run off the ranch by nightfall by rangers, screamed at him."

The girl was free, then, rubbing scorched wrists, burnt cords dangling. Mike re-entered the cabin.

"Cut me loose!" Buck whispered hurriedly.

The girl moved swiftly. She drew the slender sword from its silver sheath where it stood in a corner. Mike was half way across the cabin, moving toward her, before she could free Buck.

"Stop!" There was a note of cold finality in the girl's voice. She held the blade before her.

"Now looky here, looky here!" Mike smiled easily. "You can't start actin' up like that just before your weddin'. Your dad wouldn't like it." There was an implied threat in the man's voice. The girl hesitated, seemed to weaken. The sword lowered almost imperceptibly.

"Her dad wouldn't mind," Buck said, his voice sliding along a band of cold steel. And then, with a complete change of voice: "Jennie, your dad . . . he's dead. He got a steer horn run through him to make it look like an accident. But it wasn't an accident. He was murdered."

The girl started. The red in her cheeks was slowly replaced by ashen gray. The tiny white hand that grasped the sword

handle began to waver. It looked as if Jennie Moses was going to faint.

"You'll die for that, cowboy—now!" Mike's face was contorted in anger. His arm moved swiftly to a shoulder holster. A gleam of triumph, of sadistic anticipation sparkled through his cold eyes.

It happened with such suddenness that Buck had to blink his eyes and look again to make sure of what he saw. Mike stood there, a surprised look on his face, blood dripping from a wound across the back of his hand. A swift, light slash by the girl and his gun had slid out of a confident grasp.

"I'll break your stubborn skull for that, you little she-wildcat!" Mike's anger surged back. He reached inside a pocket quickly, brought out a long-bladed pocket knife, started advancing slowly in an attempt to scare the girl down.

From the mesa's rim then came the first barrage.

"Put down that sword, gal!" Mike roared. "Drop it!"

Hair flowing wildly, clothes tattered, wrists burned by the cords that had bound them, the girl stood there, a strange light slowly rising up through eyes that seemed to glow. She appeared not only to be staring at Mike, but to be looking right on through him. Perhaps in her mind she saw the big rambling ranchhouse that had been home, security, a place of happiness, until this man rode up. Now, perhaps, she was looking into the eyes of Mike Hinch and seeing a picture of an old man, shoulders bent, lying in a littered corral, his life's blood slowly ebbing.

The girl was fast, deft, accurate. Mike jumped aside warily. The move saved his life, but still the long sword found flesh. The blade pierced the right side of his lower stomach, too far over to be serious, but a painful flesh wound.

The infuriated giant swiftly effected a painful twist of the girl's right arm. Her grip relaxed, fell away. With his bare hands he grasped the blade. Blood trickled from hairy fingers as he drew it out of her hand and threw the crimson weapon into a corner.

Now he crept forward, a fiendish gleam in crazed eyes, the long knife gripped tightly. It was too much for the girl. The death of her father, the sight of blood from a wound she herself had inflicted—



the girl was a statue in ashen white. Jennie Moses wilted slowly, fell, and lay still.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Sword of Victory

**"REMEMBER** the Alamo! Remember Goliad! You black, dirty, scurvy murderer!" Old Gabe Watson stood swaying in the doorway, the wild look of a maniac in his eyes, a note of triumph in his voice. The thorny brush had ripped Gabe's cotton shirt to shreds. His hair was flowing and beads of dirty sweat trickled down through his beard.

Mike Hinch wheeled, emitted a muffled curse and crouched tensely. He reached inside, found the shoulder holster empty, and gripped the knife, now his only weapon.

"Ahhh!" Old Gabe's voice was a satin strand of mockery. "Yuh wanna play with knives! Wal, my gun's empty, anyhow. Killed a snake on the way up. But I got a knife."

The two men were a primitive and savage sight as they fought there with the last rays of a setting sun sending shafts of yellow light through the cabin windows. For one of them it would be sundown for keeps—perhaps for both.

Breathing heavily, tugging, straining, the knives ripped until steel blades showed bright crimson. Mike bore in savagely. Ordinarily, he would have crushed such an opponent easily, but now old Gabe fought with maniacal strength, a courage and fierceness brought on by long-denied revenge.

The blades left behind long red welts as they found flesh in their long, vicious sweeps; but as yet neither man had found a vital spot.

"Stick out your left hand, you yellar-bellied coyote!" Gabe extended his own left as if he were offering to shake hands. "Grab my paw if yuh got guts enough and we'll cut ourselves apart!" The old cowboy was now a grinning, fighting, bloody demon.

Mike was a powerful man. He had played this game before. The knotted muscles in his great arms had snapped limbs, rendered other adversaries help-

less. A glow of victory flashed through his fiery eyes as he grabbed the old cowboy's hand and squeezed hard.

Boot heels scraped across wood flooring as the two men jockeyed for position, strained to keep balance, lunged back and to the side in their attempts to catch the other napping and tilt that precarious balance. And as they worked, the steel blades slashed out.

Then suddenly Mike wheeled, brought his back to Gabe, tripped the old man with a booted leg and crouched over him, twisting with all the strength he had left. Gabe's arm snapped at the elbow. A fiendish, victorious cry burst from Mike Hinch's bloody lips. He bore in recklessly, raised his knife for the thrust that would end the fight.

Old Gabe had fallen in a corner. He lay in a partly upright position, right hand having been extended to break the fall. He felt it then, the long, cold blade lying there where it had been tossed a few minutes before he had entered the tiny cabin. Dropping his own knife, Gabe's bony hand closed tightly around the smooth handle. He jerked sharply to the left, brought up that good right hand in a sharp stab, put every ounce of remaining energy into one last thrust.

The scar-faced giant bending over him for the kill lurched slightly, brought his own knife down hard. Gabe Watson died then, a smile of deep satisfaction brightening his rough face. It was not a death smile but a victory grin. Old Gabe had died happy.

Slowly Mike Hinch straightened, a look of pained surprise on his rough features. He fell backward and lay still on the floor, the Sword of Victory quivering in his chest.



**T**HE man who had bound Buck Adams did a good job. He could move neither arms nor legs. But he could roll. He *had* to roll, to reach Jennie and bring her around somehow. Those guns were beating out a steady song of death outside. If Buck guessed right, those former Big Drone hands of the ranch would rush the mesa defenders at any moment. And already men from

the north, south, and west sides of the tiny mesa had been summoned to guard the threatened east side.

How old Gabe had managed to snake up through the sparse brush growing on the steep slopes, Buck couldn't figure. He had probably taken the little-known hog trail on the northeast rim. Crawling up on hands and knees, a man might make it, especially while the guards were watching for a general charge by horseback along the sloping east side.

The girl stirred slightly in response to Buck's frantic pleas. She was sitting up then, brushing an imaginary mist from eyes that asked a dozen questions. One glance at the still figures lying on the floor told her the story.

And then Buck was free again. He grabbed up old Gabe's gun where it had been tossed in a far corner, loaded it hurriedly. The girl searched feverishly for Mike's shoulder gun. It lay under a small table, where it had been knocked across the floor by the slashing blow of her sword.

Together they began the flank attack, firing at puffs of blue smoke that drifted up from scrub brush on the mesa's east rim. The flustered guards wheeled in sudden panic. They couldn't take it from both sides. Yet, to retreat across the mesa would be to invite a charge from the then undefended east side.

Four men rushed the cabin. It was the only thing they could do. Four more stayed, trying to cover their thinly defended line with swinging bursts of heavy gunfire.

Buck held his fire, motioned for Jennie to do likewise. Then, as the four men burst from a thin growth of scrub oak, they opened up. Their first attempts were clear misses. The men started firing as they came. A window pane shattered over the girl's head, a falling sliver of glass digging out a streak of crimson as it bit into her shoulder.

"Duck down! Get out of danger!" Buck commanded almost harshly.

"Talking to yourself, cowboy?" The girl flashed a quick smile at him and resumed her firing.

A lumbering, slant-eyed halfbreed stumbled once, leaned heavily against a lone oak bush; he was dead by the time his

knees buckled. The bush held him propped in a half-kneeling position.

"Three more!" Buck called out, and then a bullet tore through the thin board wall directly under the window, struck Buck in the left side and wheeled him half around.

"One rib gone!" Buck's voice wheezed a little. "Won't need it, though, if we don't get—"

The door crashed open, a man came climbing through a side window. Buck was still half paralyzed. He wheeled clumsily, brought up his gun and fired. The man was half through that window, and his sixgun was spitting. Buck's slug caught him square in the stomach. He humped forward with a jerk, then toppled back out of the window.

Buck turned to see Jennie sink to the floor from a blow by a ruffian who had come in through the door. The reports of their guns blended into one roar. The man wilted to the floor, his hastily fired bullet splintering the leg of an overturned chair.

One other gunman was in the room, searching for a target, firing wildly. The dark interior blinded him momentarily. Buck's gun snapped empty. He bent quickly, grasped the sword handle, and advanced on the man. Hot lead ploughed through his lower right leg and a paralyzing jolt shook his chest. The Sword of Victory flashed out blindly. . . .



BUCK ADAMS drifted up through a cloud of dark mist and saw the light of day again. There was a damp freshness in the air, and the slanting sun rays were cool. That doggoned sun had been setting when he had grabbed that sword and—

"So you've finally come around!" a voice called from the swinging door. A group of familiar shapes and faces filed in after the girl.

"Somebody might at least tell me if I'm dead." Buck's voice was a bit shaky as he spoke. "You could be an angel, all right, but Jim, Hank, Bob, and them other old hands there 'ud look mighty suspicious in heaven!" It was easy to joke like that while looking up into those familiar, grin-

ning faces. "What the heck is goin' on around here? Last I knew, we was havin' a mite of trouble with Mike Hinch's gunnies."

"We rushed them when you and Miss Jennie lightened the guard," old Jesse Dunnaway spoke, a humorous glint in his eyes. "They didn't put up much of a fight. By golly, we're thinkin' about puttin' in for a reward from the gov'ment! Ain't a bad man left in this part o' the state. Mike Hinch had dreaned the gutters dry for miles around and had just about all the coyotes in one pen here. Shore made good huntin' while it lasted."

"Hey, Buck," old Tim Mason broke in, "you're shore a sorry swordsman. That guy lyn' beside you when we busted in didn't have his head but half cut off!"

"Oh, hush, boys!" The girl smiled down at him. Buck hadn't seen a smile like that in a long, long time. "You were carrying a lot of lead. The doctor says you'll pull around all right, though."

"That the doctor?" Buck pointed to a strange face amid the circle of loyal old

Big Drone hands gathered around them.

"Nope," Fred Johnson sang out. "It's the justice o' the peace!"

"I asked him to stay overnight with us. He arrived late. It had been a long ride," the girl explained. "The rangers are here, too, working out all the details, straightening things up. The boys just won't leave. Reckon we'll have to hire every last one of them, won't we, Buck?"

"We?" the cowboy repeated, smiling widely. The girl flushed slightly. "About this justice," Buck continued. "You say he's goin' back this mornin'?"

"We *might* persuade him to stay over another day." There was an impish light in the girl's eyes. "Will you marry me, Buck Adams?"

Hank Bentsen's elbow dug into Bob Winter's ribs in a poke that brought a grunt of pain from the lanky cowboy.

Buck's face went red. "Yes'm, reckon I'd love to . . ." he stuttered, then grinned widely. "Guess I sorta need somebody around these days to keep the ropes chopped off my neck!"

#### THE END

### PICTURE OF A GRADE-A CITIZEN!

¶ Meet the kind of man who believes that any other nation and race is fit only for slavery!

¶ Meet the kind of man who believes only the rule of blood and destruction; who believes that decency, honesty and kindness are "decadent," weak, and foolish.

¶ Meet the kind of man who never asks, but *takes*—at gun-point!

¶ *Sure*, we'll meet him—with bombs, with bullets, with tanks, fighting planes, and ships!

**BUY WAR BONDS TODAY!**



# Trouble-Shooter's Last Draw

By M. HOWARD LANE

*A gun-hireling's five years' savings would buy the little cattle spread Link Cottrell longed for. He couldn't quit, though, till he'd completed one last odds-on job—with lead-coin payoff, win, lose—or draw!*

**L**INK COTTRELL watched the two passengers opposite him in the swaying Concord, and a feeling of bitterness that was hard to throttle crowded against his lips.

The passengers were old Major Burk, who had earned his spurs in the War between the States, and his daughter Jacqueline. Major Burk was President of the Red Bird Mine Syndicate, high in the Santa Ritas behind the hurrying stage that was carrying them down Canyon Grade toward Tucson.

Lips tight, Link forced his eyes to look

through the windows on his side of the coach, but sight of the whizzing scenery couldn't make him forget his bleak thoughts. In fact, the wild mountain beauty only seemed to sharpen his thinking, Link found.

"My guns are good enough for 'em," he muttered savagely under his breath, "but I ain't. 'Howdy,' says the major when we climb in at the Red Bird, and his daughter nods, and that's all. Yeah, they'll buy my guns, but they won't speak to us after me'n Bett do a job for 'em."

Mention of his partner's name, who was



Link had forced an argument on the two labor-baiters in a card game.

riding the box alongside feisty old Slow Joe Saunders, recalled a conversation to Link's mind. Together, he and Bett Parsons had drawn their money from the mine paymaster that morning, and afterwards Parsons had snorted his disgust.

"Look at it," he had said sourly. "Look at this layout. The richest mine in the Santa Ritas. So a couple of Tucson troublemakers get jobs here, and stir up a ruckus. All hell is set to break. So what happens? So a rush call catches us in Yuma, and we hightail it over here, and put the quietus on trouble by chasing them two tough pups out of camp. And all the time we were at it, we were apt to get a pick handle slapped behind our ears or lead in the brisket."

Exasperatedly, Bett Parsons had jingled coins from hand to hand. "Two hundred measly dollars we get for facin' brickbats and lead, and we save the Red Bird and Major Burk's two million!"

Link had listened, but he hadn't liked his old partner's remarks. When Bett got to talking like this about what he figured were the injustices of life, he was apt to do some fool reckless thing he might later regret. Actually, Link had forced an argument on the two labor-baiters in a card game and had then run them to hell out of town at the point of a gun.

Quietly, Link had tried to calm his partner. "Two hundred iron men ain't bad pay for two weeks work," he'd said soberly. "I've earned a heap sight less punchin' cows, but one of these days we're going back to it—soon as a few more jobs like this give us the stake."

Parsons had snorted and walked off, neck still stiff with anger. As Link had watched him move away, another little bit of the hope that had kept him going seemed to melt from a secret place in his heart. Thinking about it now wasn't helping matters any, Link realized, but he found that he couldn't stop his thoughts.

He was twenty-eight, with five years of riding the West's danger trails behind him, and there were bullet scars on his body to check each of those years. He remembered how he had hooked up with Bett Parsons. A spectator at a shooting match some of them had put on in Prescott, Bett had approached Link after it was over.

"Cottrell," he'd said, "I've been looking a long time for a gent as handy with a Colt as you. There's plenty honest jobs around this country for men with guts and guns, and the pay beats your forty and found."

Link had liked the small, wispy, prematurely gray man. After a little more talk they had shaken hands on a share-and-share-alike deal. And during these five years, as they'd gained a reputation for being trouble-shooters, only one sore point had developed between them. Link had tried to convince his partner that they should save their money, buy a little two-bit spread, and settle down while they still had their health.

But Bett hadn't seen it that way. "When we make our move, kid," he always said, "we want enough dinero to set up in style. No two-bit herd and a shack in the hills for me. But don't you worry about it. One of these days we'll make the kind of stake that'll start us high, wide, and handsome."

Thoughtlessly, Link pulled his eyes back from the passing scenery, and he saw Major Burk's daughter quickly turn her head. She had been looking at him, Link realized. Her action made him seethe inwardly. "Probably trying to locate my horns and tail!" he thought.

♦ ♦ ♦

HE WAS twisting his head to look out of the coach window once more when movement on the opposite seat caught his eye and he heard breath gasp sharply from a man's lungs.

Link got himself turned back in time to see Major Burk's big body topple sideways against the slenderness of his daughter. His normally ruddy face had turned a sudden gray. Pallor was spreading to the roots of the thick mane of white hair that reached back from his forehead. His mouth hung open, loosely sucking for air, and one hand clutched at his chest.

"His heart," Link heard Jacqueline Burk gasp as he came to his feet. Tall body stooped to hold his balance in the rocking Concord, he hammered on the roof with his fist, and shouted, "Hold it, Saunders. Stop the stage. Stop it!"

With desperate strength, Jacqueline

Burk was trying to hold her father on the seat. Link dropped on the opposite side of the sick man, and circled the major's shoulders with one wiry arm. Boot heels gouging into the floorboards to brace himself, he took the other's weight from the girl. Her brown eyes thanked him.

Hurriedly she fumbled inside the handbag in the lap of her brown traveling dress, and words spilled from her lips. "Dad's been sick since that trouble at the mine started. It hit him pretty hard, because he'd always tried to see that the men had the best of working conditions."

A small vial of liquid came from her bag. She unscrewed the cap, and pressed the bottle to her father's lips. Link saw the mine president swallow. Some stiffness came back into the man's lax body, but his face still remained gray.

The girl was speaking hurriedly as Slow Joe Saunders sawed his running bronco team to a halt. "I—I have been wanting to thank you and your partner for all you've done," Link heard her saying, "but I've been so worried about dad that I just haven't had the chance. And today, riding together, you've looked so cold and distant that I've been afraid to speak."

Link wanted to laugh, but he throttled the impulse. Bett had said these Easterners would treat him like dirt under their boots, and that impression had kept him aloof from them. The fault, he realized now, was more his than theirs. The girl had said he looked cold. He guessed that he did. Forbidding black clothes and a wide black hat, and a face that he had learned to keep expressionless, those things didn't tend to make him easy company.

"We're on our way to Chicago and a heart specialist," the girl said as brake shoes screeched the stage to a final halt. "I—I've been praying that nothing happens at the Red Bird while we're gone. Dad takes his responsibilities so seriously that I'm afraid if more trouble comes—"

The girl left the sentence unfinished as Slow Joe Saunders yanked open the coach door. "What the tarnation—" he began, and then he saw the sagging shape of Major Burk supported by the young gunmaster's arm.

"Grab his feet," Link ordered.

"He—he'll be all right if he's quiet for

a while," Jacqueline said. "The medicine will help."

Out of the corner of his eye as they made the major comfortable in the shade of a pine alongside the road, Link noticed that his partner had not left the box. Bett Parsons' prematurely gray hair was glowing like steel in the sunlight, for he had removed his tuck-crowned hat to slap dust from its brim.

That small action caught at an edge of Link Cottrell's attention. Bett wasn't the kind of man to waste effort on a hot day, and his partner certainly knew that his hat would collect more dust on the rest of the ride to Tucson. He watched Bett's cold, handsomely chiseled face rise as he lifted his hat, and puffed breath about the rim to blow away the last of the collected dust. And he noticed that Bett's chill gray eyes were not looking at what he was doing. His partner's gaze was focused across the rim of the hat at something that lay ahead of the halted stage.

Link had rolled his coat to pillow the mine president's head, and without either the girl or old driver noticing he followed the direction of Bett Parson's eyes.

At first, Link couldn't figure out what had caught his partner's attention. Rugged slopes stippled with pine rose on either side of the road. Calico-hued boulders dotted the slant. A little ahead, a varicolored outcrop of stone jutted from the steep slope. Flat-topped, the ledge seemed to lean above the narrow, rutted road. That ledge, Link decided, was the only thing that could be attracting Bett's attention, and yet there was nothing about it in the least unusual. He dismissed his partner's queer actions from his mind, and looked down at the sick man on the ground.

Major Burk's eyes were open, and the look of pain in them was gone. He smiled up at the lean, bronzed young gun-master above him. "Thanks, Cottrell," he said on a gaspy breath. "Didn't mean to be any more trouble to you and your pard. You boys went through enough for us up at the mine."

The Red Bird president's words were sincerely spoken, Link realized. It was easy for him to see now why the major hadn't been sociable on their ride from the mine. The man had been fighting pain



all the way, trying by will power alone to thwart the heart attack.

"We were just lucky, I guess," Link mumbled. "Those two trouble-makers stirring up your men weren't hard to chase out of camp once we picked 'em out."

"Except that locating them was like playing blind man's buff with a rattle-snake! Howsomer, you wouldn't know how that feels," Bett Parsons spoke the words from his seat on the stage.

Link felt his face growing hot as Jacqueline Burk looked slowly from one to the other. "I have been told," she said deliberately, "that men in your occupation fall into one of two classes. Either they are gentlemen who feel they're rendering the West a service by helping to bring law and order. The other type," her red lips curled scornfully, "are killers, interested only in gold and glory!"



HER implication was obvious. Bett Parsons' handsome face twisted humorously, but before he could answer the girl a long-striding Link Cottrell was at the front wheel of the wagon.

Link reached up to clamp his partner's knee. "Bett, what's the matter with you? We've got a sick man on our hands."

"If he had blood in his veins instead of gold, he wouldn't be sick," Parsons snapped.

And then, watching his partner, Link saw Bett gain control of himself. He even managed to smile. "I'm sorry I was rude, ma'am," he said gruffly. "My temper is ugly at best. Sometimes it's worse after a chore like we've just completed for the Red Bird."

Link felt relief, and a certain pride in his partner. It took guts for a man of Bett Parsons' hot nature to apologize to anybody. "Forget it, fellow," he said quickly. "We're all a little excited, I guess."

"Yes," Jacqueline nodded, but her smile was for Link Cottrell alone. Her eyes admired the powerful set of his body beneath the black broadcloth of his knee-length coat. She liked the lean, quietness of his rawboned features, the uncompromising straightness of his lips. Only the reckless little lights that seemed to be

dancing in the back of his blue eyes, and the quick, strong slenderness of his smooth hands tabbed him for a gunman.

Twenty minutes later they were rattling on their way again, with Saunders driving slowly for once in his life. Major Burk, with some of the color back in his face, reclined on the seat he and his daughter had occupied before, and Jacqueline sat with Link. His tallness made her seem small, and yet there was a round, warm womanliness to her that held all of Link's attention. Her face was oval, and there was the slightest powdering of freckles across the bridge of her small straight nose.

Realizing guiltily that he had been looking at her too closely, Link started to twist toward the window once again. Then he felt her light touch on his sleeve.

"Please don't." Her voice sounded a little breathless. "I thought we might be able to talk. It will help pass the time."

"You're right there, Jackie," Major Burk said huskily. "I'm tired of listening to my own thoughts."

Link felt a warm glow through his body, and then he reminded himself that gunsmoke and girls like Jacqueline Burk don't mix. "Keep your head, you danged fool," he admonished himself silently.

But somehow as the miles wore on, Link found himself talking easily to these Easterners. Under their skillful questioning, they were learning the details of his life, of how the simple ambition to own a little spread of his own had brought him to the highly paid trails of danger.

"Me'n Bett have got enough in our socks now to start the kind of two-bit outfit I want," Link told them, "but he won't see it my way. He wants an A-1 outfit or nothin'."

Major Burk had risen on one elbow to listen to him. "I started with a teaspoon and skillet in the California diggings in '49," he growled, "and that was good enough for me or any man. Son, since you and your pard drove those cussed troublemakers, Jeb Lassiter and Cal Purdy, from the Red Bird, I've been wracking my mind trying to figure a way to show you how much we appreciate your good work. Now I think you've given me the answer." He paused to draw a gaspy breath, and continued: "Up near

Prescott, I own a little mountain ranch that ought to be just the thing you're looking for. You'll need a partner to help operate it, and I'll see the price isn't too steep. Talk it over with Parsons when we hit town, and let me know how he feels."



THOSE last miles to Tucson were the longest Link Cottrell had ever ridden. Head busy with plans for convincing Bett that here was the opportunity they had waited for so long, he seethed with impatience for the trip to end.

In deference to the major and his daughter, Slow Joe drove them to the Tucson House. Link helped Major Burk inside. The old gentleman's nod and Jacqueline's smile thanked him as he tipped his hat and returned to the board walk.

Bett was waiting, standing between their bags, which he had removed from the boot of the stage. A sardonic grin was twisting his lips when Link reached his side.

"Danged if you don't remind me of that English hombre who laid his coat in a mud puddle so's the queen wouldn't git her feet wet crossin' the street," he drawled.

Link ignored the slur in his partner's speech. "Bett," he said, with something almost like desperation in his voice, "you got those folks figgered wrong. The major's an all-right hombre. I was tellin' him about our plans for quitting this game and going to ranching, and he's got just the kind of little spread we want up Prescott way. He'll make it easy for us to buy—"

"Little, did you say?" There was sly amusement in the eyebrow Bett Parsons cocked at his tall partner. "Kid, you take our bags, and drop 'em off at the barber shop up the street and get yourself a shave and bath. Meet me at The Lodestar afterwards. I need a drink, and you'll be ready for one yourself by then. Mebbe Burk's offer is just the beginnin'," he added. "Might be that we'll have the kind of spread I want afore we leave Tucson."

Link blinked after the small, dapper

shape of his gray-clad partner, and then slowly he stooped to pick up their bags. He was used to taking orders from Bett—and used to doing the hard work, when it came to that. But as he hefted their grips they seemed inordinately heavy. Bett was passing the barber shop right now, and he could have dropped off his own suitcase.

It was a small thing, and amounted to nothing, Link told himself. Bett was all right. The dapper gunnie had shown more interest in the scheme he'd propounded, Link realized, than he had dared to hope. Of course, he'd made the usual remark about wanting a big spread, but at least he hadn't turned down the major's offer.

More hopeful than he dared to admit, Link pushed through afternoon throngs to reach the barber shop. As he climbed the steps he caught a glimpse of Bett's square shoulders on up the boardwalk ahead of him. Fading sunlight glinted on the big silver watch his partner had pulled from his pocket. Link watched Parsons look at the watch, ram it back into his pocket, and almost break into a run.

Bett, he decided, was certainly acting queer. This was the first time he'd ever seen his partner have to look at his stem-winder to know when it was first drivin' time.

The barber shop was full up, Link found, and the bathtub in the back room was occupied.

"Leave your grips," the owner offered, "and come back in an hour or so. Won't be so busy then."

Link thanked the man with a nod, and turned back to the walk. He found himself hurrying in the direction Bett had taken, and he couldn't figure the reason for his own rush. Common sense told him that Bett's mood would be more mellow after whiskey had relaxed him. A few drinks and his partner might be willing to accept the major's offer to leave the danger trails for good. Trails that a man couldn't ride forever without taking fatal lead.

The sign of The Lodestar loomed on his left, and Link pressed through the swing doors. It was dusky inside the big saloon, and he paused for a moment to adjust his eyes to the light. As they grew

more accustomed, he was surprised to note that Bett wasn't at the long bar to his left. A little blankly, he let his gaze sweep the tables ranged about the other three sides of the saloon. Only one of the faro layouts was busy, for this was the slack hour of day. Eyes running on, he saw Bett seated at a small round table in the rear of the room.

There were two men with Parsons, and they were facing the front entrance. Recognition was instantly mutual as Link's swinging gaze caught them, and shock moved down his back like trickles of cold water.

The pair at the table with his partner were Jeb Lassiter and Cal Purdy, the two troublemakers who had tried to stir the Red Bird miners into demanding higher pay!



STIFF-LEGGED, like a man walking in his sleep, Link found himself pacing down the room. Silence followed him as patrons at the bar caught the tense scent of danger. Link knew all eyes were on him, but he paid the fact no attention. Slowly, he stumped closer to the table, hands hanging loosely forward.

Cal Purdy was a short, blocky man with a greasy curl of black hair hanging across his low forehead. Link saw the man's lips twist and his hands dip below table level.

There were men in the saloon who later were ready to swear that Link Cottrell's coat spread back of its own accord, and that the black Colts holstered low on his thighs had lifted into the gun-master's hands of their own accord. At any rate he had them out, and his voice, when he spoke, was as chilly as the cold muzzles.

"Get on your feet, Purdy," Link droned. "You, too, Lassiter."

Jeb Lassiter was taller than his companion, a hatchet-faced, slash-mouthed man. For the space of a minute he seemed to be measuring his chances. Then he kicked back his chair and rose.

During these wickedly tense seconds, Bett Parsons had remained carefully still. Lassiter looked down at him as he reached his feet. "If I was you," he advised, "I'd teach my pard better manners. He's too

all-fired ready to pull his guns on friends."

Link spoke through gritted teeth. "You're no friends of mine," he said flatly. "Get out of here, and don't come back while I'm around."

This whole thing was a nightmare that made no sense. Brain whirling with unanswered questions, Link watched the pair duck their heads and shuffle toward the door. There was a meekness about them, a desire to get out of here without precipitating a showdown. Link didn't like that, somehow. Out at the Red Bird, he and Bett had found the pair as elusive as a lone flea in a bedroll. Tough, dangerous hombres, both of them, their present actions left a sour taste in his mouth, sent a warning through him.

As the swing doors closed on them, Link swung back. Bett was watching him, the edge of a rueful grin curving his lips. "Kid," he drawled softly as he poured drinks from the bottle on the table, "you were pretty rough on two lads who are aimin' to help us get the dinero for that Class A spread you want."

Link tossed off the whiskey to hide his confusion, and the raw bite of it was something he didn't even notice. Now that he was near his partner, he could see the nervous excitement that was lighting Parsons' eyes and tautening the flat planes of his face.

Slowly, he spoke. "Bett, I don't get it. This is the first time I've ever seen you get chummy with any hombres after tanglein' with 'em. As fer your talk of a ranch, you know what I want."

"Kid, you want a big spread just as much as I do," Parsons drawled. "We're both tired of this game, and it's time we got out. I got a hunch our number is about to be called. When you feel that way it's time to quit. But we're going out in style. Now don't go askin' me questions, and button them guns up the next time you see Lassiter and Purdy. They ain't bad fellers when you get to know 'em—and you'll know 'em better come night. We're meetin' 'em at their room in the Tucson House at eight o'clock."

Link bumped men and women alike on his way back to the barber shop. He murmured 'sorry' each time, and then did it again, for the people on the walks were nothing but shadows to him. He was fully

conscious of nothing but the confusion of his own thoughts.

All the time he was being shaved he tried to figure out just what Bett had meant. Parsons knew the only thing in the world he wanted was a little place that two men could run. How, then, could that pair of troublemakers help them get money for the kind of ranch that Bett wanted? And why should they help either of them? Together they'd given that pair a tough time. Now Lassiter and Purdy were ready to lend them a hand.

Owning a big ranch was almost an obsession with Bett Parsons. Owning a small one, Link realized, was almost as much of an obsession with him. He wondered, a little dismally, just how they were going to get together. In the morning he had to give Major Burk his answer.

"I'll see what Bett's got up his sleeve tonight," he muttered as he soaked in the barber-shop tub, "and I'll try once more to make him see reason."



AT EIGHT that evening, Link stood, tall and austere, in a Tucson House hotel room. Backed to the closed door, he listened and watched the three men grouped about the small table.

Lassiter and Purdy lounged in a pair of chairs. Bett Parsons occupied a third. The fourth was empty.

"Make your talk," Link had said, declining the seat. "I won't sit down with you hombres, and yuh know it!"

Now, with a shade of worry furrowing his brow, Jeb Lassiter looked at Parsons. "This pard of yours won't make talk, will he?"

Nerves keyed up to the breaking point, Link answered before Bett could speak. "When I make talk it's with my guns. Get on with the meeting."

Lassiter shrugged. "Grab your hat, mister. This is it. Yuh can believe it or not, but word came down from the Red Bird this morning that sixty thousand in bullion is being brought out tonight."

Link felt his muscles growing tighter. "How'd you get that word!" he demanded. "We didn't bring it to you, and neither did Slow Joe Saunders."

Cal Purdy chuckled lazily, and poured whiskey into glasses on the table. "Ever hear of carrier pigeons, amigo? You boys figured chasing us out of camp finished things, but it didn't. Fact is, you done us a favor. Burk wouldn't try to send out his gold while we kept the pot boilin' there. He was afraid the load might be raided. Well it's going to be. And we need two fast guns for a fifty-fifty split. You've got the gun-savvy, plus clean reps. No one will ever figger you for having a hand in it. Fact is, we'll double right back to town, and when Burk gets word of the holdup, he'll probably hire you boys to take the trail of the thieves. That way you'll be collecting double from the deuce!"

Through a roaring of blood in his ears, Link heard Bett confidently answer for both of them. "You've bought two recruits," he drawled, with a little laugh. "Thirty thousand, kid," he added to Cottrell, "will set us up on just the kind of ranch we both want."

Link licked his lips, and they felt sandpaper-dry. He couldn't speak for a moment, and by his silence the others seemed to take his agreement for granted. Through that pounding blood in his ears, he heard Jeb Lassiter explaining the situation in detail.

"According to the note that pimply clerk in the paymaster's office sent down by pigeon this morning, the superintendent is tryin' to pull a shindy just in case anybody is waiting to waylay their gold wagon. Halfway down Slow Joe Saunders is going to meet the wagon and transfer the gold to his stage. Likely he'll be all alone when he starts back here to Tucson. The wagon will return to the mine."

"We'll take care of Slow Joe," Bett Parsons was almost humming the words. "That's a small chore to earn thirty thousand. Ain't it, kid?"

From his place against the door, Link saw his partner smile at him, and the smile was as friendly as it had ever been. Five years they'd ridden the danger trails together. But those danger trails had been straight trails. Now the fork of the road lay ahead.

Something in the expression on Link Cottrell's face seemed to warn Bett Parsons of the fight going on inside the young

man. He pushed back his chair and climbed to his feet.

"Kid," he took a step toward the door, "what's the matter with you? You want a ranch, don't you? A nice big place where you can hang your feet over the porch rail, and watch your cattle git fat?"

Link found the knob of the door with one hand. He swallowed, and his throat felt dry. "No," he said hoarsely, "not that kind of ranch."

Before his eyes, Link watched Bett's face grow ugly. "Kid," his words came softly, "you're not walking out on us, are you?"

"Yes," Link answered, and suddenly he felt very tired. "I guess this is adios."

Lassiter and Purdy were hunched, frozen shapes at the table. Incredulity had sagged their lips. Bett was halfway across the room now, and his hands were hanging loose at his sides.

"Kid," he said in the same soft, purring tones, "you won't be doing any talking, will you? If your tongue gets itchy, just remember that my guns have always been faster than yours!"

The threat was open and above board, and yet somehow it made Link want to laugh. "Why, Bett," he said, "I'm not the talking kind."

There was more he wanted to say, but the words seemed to stick in his throat. He wanted to bid his partner a proper goodbye, maybe wanted to remind him of the times they'd stood back to back with Colts blazing in their fists. Remind him of the taut bonds of friendship that Bett had just severed with a nod of his head. But those words wouldn't come, for Bett Parsons was suddenly a stranger, with a narrow, hard face.

Link opened the door. In silence as deep as a dark, black pool, he stepped backward into the upstairs hall. None of the three left behind him said anything, but Bett had one slim hand placed suggestively on the stock of his Colt.

Slowly, Link moved toward the stair head, and the turmoil in him knotted his stomach and made him feel cold all over. He found himself trying to excuse Bett. Bett, who had always been straight, but was now ready to take the wrong fork of the trail. His partner had figured they were underpaid for the job they'd done

at the Red Bird. With that feeling in him, he'd been easy bait for the robbery scheme Purdy and Lassiter had hatched. But even as he was trying to use this excuse for Bett, Link found his head shaking. Bett, he realized with grim honesty, had followed the straight path these years they'd been together, only because a fool-proof opportunity like this hadn't ever offered itself before. Bett wanted to get rich in a hurry and quit the danger trails.

"And I want to quit 'em, too," Link thought. "But I can't, with this hanging over my head."

In his mind he was remembering a gray-faced major fighting for breath; a worried girl whispering to him that if any more trouble hit the Red Bird, the shock would probably kill her father.

One hint dropped to the sheriff, and Bett Parsons and his compadres would meet blazing guns on the Canyon Grade down from the Red Bird. No word to the sheriff, and old Slow Joe Saunders would die. So, likely, would Major Burk. Dividends that sixty thousand would pay, would have to be skipped. And that would spell hardship for small investors counting on that money.

All the ramifications of what that raid might mean were like a gigantic umbrella spreading and widening above him. Link looked down at his hands and then he clenched one fist.

"I told Bett I wouldn't talk," he spoke the words softly, "and I won't. But I didn't promise to muzzle my guns."



AT THE livery where Slow Joe kept his Concord and team, Link learned that the old driver had pulled out at dark.

"Headed back up for the Red Bird with fresh broncs in the traces," the liveryman told Cottrell. "Said the reason for his run was to get clothes and extry medicine for the major."

Link nodded abstractedly. Dark had fallen two hours earlier, which gave Saunders a good start. "I want the fastest hoss in your string," he said abruptly. "Forgot some stuff of my own up at the mine. If I can catch Slow Joe he can bring it back and save me a long ride."

Ten minutes later he was slipping from Tucson along dark back streets, and an hour later the jaws of the crooked Canyon Grade were closing on either side of his galloping mount.

All the way to here, Link had been trying to figure just where Bett and the Purdy-Lassiter duo would pull their holdup. A man forewarned of such a thing could be ready and waiting. A sliver moon cast enough radiance for him to study the brushy canyon walls, and the farther he rode the more at sea Link found himself. There were a dozen places, a hundred, where road agents could conceal themselves.

Likely, Slow Joe Saunders had already met the gold wagon and transferred the bullion to his coach. All alone, the veteran stager was probably racketing back down the grade toward him. Then, as though his thoughts had conjured the stage, Link heard the rattle of Concord wheels as he halted his mount for a short breather.

Around the next bend was the place where they had halted that afternoon to let the major rest, Link remembered. As that memory crossed mind, another one blotted it out, and sent the spurs he had borrowed from the liveryman raking back toward the flanks of his mount. In his mind's eye he was seeing Bett Parsons surreptitiously studying the ledge that jutted out from the canyon wall at that point. Men flattened atop it could pour a withering fire downward with little danger to themselves.

"An' Bett," the words were torn from Link's lips, as the roan mount under him leaped forward, "had something like this in his mind all the way down here. Might be he even met that Lassiter and Purdy for a secret talk at the mine."

Another bit of evidence of pre-arrangement came into Link's mind. He remembered the way Bett had tried to shoo him into the barber shop, and how he had noticed his partner studying his watch and hurrying on to The Lodestar. "That whole meeting tonight was framed for my benefit to git me in with 'em." Link felt his tongue twist on the words, and it shattered the last regard he'd had for Bett Parsons.

Like a sardonic answer to the discovery he had made, Link heard the sudden

whipcrack of a rifle around the bend ahead, then the scream of a horse in mortal agony. Even before he rounded the bend, he knew what had happened. Short-cut trails known to Purdy and Lassiter had brought them here ahead of him, and lead from one of their guns had dropped one of Saunders' horses in the traces.

The sound of rending wood and the frenzied snorts of the team, as the heavy coach plowed into them, was in Link's ears as he swept the roan closer to the bend. Only one thing favored him, Link realized bleakly. The noise up ahead was drowning the sound of his approach.

Sharp-cut as though done on canvas, the kaleidoscopic scene of trouble was etched in the moonlight for him to see as the roan rounded the bend. Piled in a fighting tangle, the six-horse hitch struggled frenziedly. Saunders' Concord was tilted drunkenly, half off the road, and old Slow Joe himself was trying to grab his scattergun from the floorboards.

Atop the ledge, three figures loomed, black-cut silhouettes in the moonlight. Their stance was stiff, and Link realized that something unexpected had kept them from pouring lead into Slow Joe.

Then he saw what the trio were staring at as moonlight glittered on nickel-plated steel at a canted coach window. "Stand right where you are," Link heard a firm voice call, "or I'll shoot!"

Jacqueline Burk was inside the gold coach!



"**C**UT her down!" Jeb Lassiter's voice, as cold as his hatchet-thin face, came to Link.

Bett Parsons' voice, as chill as Lassiter's, answered the outlaw. "Shoot a woman?" Link heard his partner say. "I don't hold with that, Jeb. Why not try your lead on me, instead?"

"And mebbe you think we weren't aimin' 'to," stocky Cal Purdy had sidled to the left, and the rifle in his hands was swinging hip-high to cover Parsons. "Why, yuh fool," he sneered, "that pretty little word-duel you and yore kid pard put on at the hotel didn't blind us any. He ain't to be trusted, and neither are you. So we figgered to let you pull our chest-



nuts outa the fire, and then load your back with lead. But I'd just as leave fill your guts full of it—right now!”

Bett was not all bad. That was the thought which flashed through Link's mind, and he lifted his gun for a desperate try at diverting the attention of Purdy. But even as he triggered, he knew that his play had come too late.

Bett Parsons' draw was the fastest he had ever made, yet it wasn't quick enough to beat lead from an already leveled Winchester.

Link saw Bett's body stiffen, and seem to lift from the shelf. Then his feet were moving him blindly toward the drop-off. A last step carried him into space, and he was tumbling and rolling down the sheer face of the ledge.

Lead seared beneath his arm as Lassiter saw him for the first time, and the hot touch of it roused murder in Link's heart. Spurring forward, he smashed bullets at the outlaw pair on the shelf. He saw one of his slugs drop Purdy like a clubbed steer, and killing was pleasant to Link for the first time since he'd joined gunster ranks.

“That's for Bett!” he heard himself shout.

A shotgun's blast from the stage box dimmed his words, and Link saw Lassiter go over backward as though a strong wind had blown him. He knew that the man would be dead before his body struck the shelf.

Through gunsmoke roiling about the coach, Link saw Bett's body stir slightly at the base of the shelf. Instantly he was down from his livery mount. On foot, he reached his partner as Saunders helped Jacqueline Burk from the canted stage.

Parsons' lips smiled slightly as Link dropped beside him. “Kid,” he whis-

pered, “I told you my number was up. Guess mebbe I warn't as tough as I'd figured to be. Couldn't see a woman shot, for all the gold in Kingdom Come—”

Saunders and the girl were right behind Link now, but he was hardly aware of their presence. Bett held all of his attention, and he could see that his partner was trying to speak again.

“Kid—” his voice was fading “—don't you worry none about me. I'm ready to cross the river, and I can see just the kind of spread I've always wanted on the other side. You stay here and take good care of that purty gal, on a ranch big enough for two. If—if yuh don't know the one I mean, son, look over your shoulder—”

Link felt Bett's body grow limp under his hands, and he heard a sob behind him. Jacqueline Burk dropped down on her knees, and he felt one of her arms slip about his waist.

This miracle of a new life was coming out of death, Link realized, and it made him feel very humble. “How come—” he started one question.

Jacqueline finished it for him. “How come I'm here? Oh, Link, that's simple. I knew the gold was on its way down tonight, and I—I just stowed away in the stage when Mr. Saunders wasn't looking. I had to see that nothing happened to this shipment.”

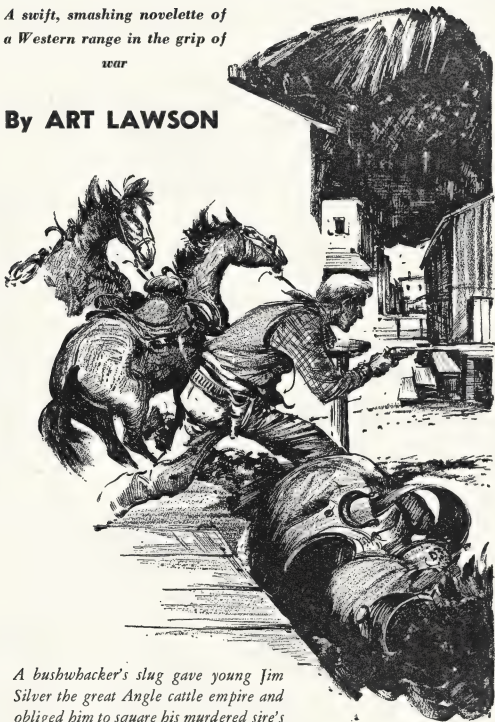
“With a danged popgun in her hand she was going to guard it.” Slow Joe Saunders chuckled creakily. “Blast me, Cottrell, this gal may be an Easterner, but she's got the kind of stuff in her that'll make a danged good Westerner!”

Link looked into her upturned face, and nodded slowly, for he was seeing there all the things he had ever wanted. “Yes,” he breathed softly. “Yes.”



*A swift, smashing novelette of  
a Western range in the grip of  
war*

**By ART LAWSON**



*A bushwhacker's slug gave young Jim Silver the great Angle cattle empire and obliged him to square his murdered sire's account by bringing the torch, the gun—and the hangrope, if necessary—to each and every nester in the Angle dominion—even to the shanty home of the girl he loved!*

# RAWHIDE AND DYNAMITE



Three men were suddenly in the street. Jim opened fire.

## CHAPTER ONE

### New King for the Angle

OLD JIM SILVER was tougher than rawhide made from the shoulders of his lean longhorn steers, and as rugged as that incredibly broken country between the Llano Estacado and the Rio Rojo where his uncounted herds roamed like wary wild elk. From the great bend of the Brazos to the dry fork of the Cimarron he was known as the hardest man to ride the great plains. But a piece of soft metal finally downed old Jim Silver. A chunk of lead broke his

back a few inches above the hips and killed him.

He lived just long enough to scrawl in the red-dust floor of the gulch where he lay:

"Angles yors Jimboy and yu kin hold her."

Jimboy, as the old man called him, was not the man who found his dead father. Jimboy was busy at the time sparking a nester girl who ran a small chicken farm on Skeleton Branch of Pecan Creek. As carefully as the bushwhacker who had stalked his father, young Jim had stalked this girl. He had caught her when she came up the creek looking for wild plums that she would make into jam.

"Bang!" he announced. "Yo're dead. I'm an Injun."

The girl did not scream. She opened her mouth and eyes very widely, then took a deep breath and turned to face Jim Silver. The cowboy was standing in the center of the path along which she had come. Despite the big spurs with the chains let out, he had moved without a sound from brush to path. It frightened her as much as his sudden appearance.

"You don't have to shoot me to kill me," she said. "I'm nearly dead now. My heart's beating so hard—"

"Let me see," he suggested.

He stepped toward her, lifting a hand as if to feel the beat of her heart. The girl slapped his hand away. Then she smiled up at him. It was mischievous, wild, piquant—with a bit of Satan in her blue eyes. It was the kind of a smile that twisted up the insides of big Jim Silver and made him want to howl like a lobo wolf.

Before he could lift his hand to take her she whirled and fled down the path. Jim laughed. He gave chase—and caught her exactly where she wanted to be caught, in a glade where Skeleton Branch takes a dip and a twist, where wild plums grow higher than your head and are interlaced with grape vines that will bear heavy fruit when the plum season has passed. She let him catch her there and twist her around to face him; but she lifted her pail between them so that it jabbed him in the stomach when he tried to draw her to him.

"We must fill this pail first," she insisted.

Jim sighed. He dropped his hand from her shoulder. "Okay," he said. "By then you'll have thought up something else."

"Certainly," she agreed.

They went to work, he taking the high plums, she the low, and soon the pail was filling with its hard little deep purple fruit. Silently they picked until he asked, "When are we going to get married?"

"Soon's your father stops hounding mine," she said very quickly, as if she had rehearsed it and had kept it on the tip of her tongue to have it ready when he asked that question.

He glanced down at her sidewise from the corners of his eyes. Young Jim was well over six feet. Physically, he was as hard as his old man had ever been. Lean hips, shoulders as broad as a barn door and muscled with steel. But young Jim, folks said, had a heart as well as a mind—something that old Jim had never had.

"He ain't been around again, has he?"

"Sure," she said. Her dark eyelashes swept down, then lifted in a flash of deep blue. "He came over this morning. He gave us three days to git."

"Are you 'gitting'?" Jim asked.

"You think I'd be putting up preserves for winter if I was?" she countered.

Jim grinned. This little nester girl had spirit. He said, "I'll tell him to keep away."

"You think he would?" the girl asked with a very faint hope.

"No," Jim admitted. "But I've got an idea. Something I thought up last night. How would your old man like to go to work for mine?"

"He'd never make a cowboy," she said. "He doesn't know anything but farming."

"That's my idea," Jim said eagerly. "Wouldn't hurt our Angle boys to eat fresh eggs now and then instead of State's Eggs. Same thing about fresh tomatoes. We don't have to eat everything out of cans. Your old man could sort of run a farm for the Angle. We've got just about a hundred men working for us. It would keep your old man mighty busy hauling in the food he grows, to say nothing of growing it."

Eagerness came into the girl's eyes, too. She was seeing this dream as a practical thing, as well as a solution to their immediate problems.

"If only we can get them together," she said.

"We can," Jim assured her.

He slid his hand up the bail of the pail until it touched hers. Her eyes wavered. A little blot of red spread on her cheekbones and she was purely lovely. Jim wondered why some people had to be nesters and some cattlemen. Why did you have to be born with enemies? We were all in the same world. Why couldn't we all be in the same boat, as well? Why weren't people just simply people?

It was too much for Jim to decide at that moment. He knew only that her people were enemies of his—and that he was going to wipe out that enmity. When he was finished the nesters and cattlemen would all be working together for a common cause.

She said suddenly, "Jim, I'm sure we can work it out. I'll talk to Pop. You talk to your father. We'll be married after harvest—"

"After round-up," Jim said. "We talk a different language up there on the Rio Rojo."

"After round-up, then," she said, laughing.

Jim asked, "Shake hands on that?"

"Sure," she laughed.

She let go of the pail so that he held it alone, and she reached up to take his face in her hands to draw his lips down to hers. Never before had they kissed. Their first contact threw a shock through them like liquid dynamite. The girl jumped away. Her dark lashes were down over her gently-tanned cheeks.

"We'll never get these plums picked," she said in a shaky whisper.



YOUNG Jim Silver rode down-trail carrying the pail of plums while the girl walked at the head of his horse. They were having a joke. Her father would come out of their shanty to drive him off with a double-barreled shotgun as he always did when Jim showed on the scene. When he did so Linda Kane would insist that she had captured him. Then they'd tell the old man their plans.

But Pop wasn't there. A brace of Angle horses stood by the rickety porch awning.

An Angle cowboy was under that awning, and another at the rear of the house.

"Trouble," Jim said. "Looks like my old man couldn't wait. Stay here."

He passed her the pail of wild plums. He tried a smile to reassure her and saw that she was not frightened. Then he lifted his horse into a trot and closed in on the shanty that stood near the bank of Skeleton Branch. Flowers had been gathered from the woods and planted in a tiny garden by the front door. Curtains hung in the windows. Even with the promise of trouble, these woman-things caused an ache within young Jim Silver. They were things he had never known in that great, bare home on the Rio Rojo.

The man under the awning came out when Jim drew near. His horse was eating the girl's flowers. Jim slapped the mustang away.

"What's up, Mizzou?" he said then.

The cowboy known as Mizzou or Missouri shook his block-shaped head. He was one of the Angle Ranch's oldest cowboys in term of service but nobody knew anything about him except that he came from Missouri.

"I just come down this way to side you home," he said. "Your old man—uh—"

Jim laughed. "He never did like my hanging around Skeleton Branch," he admitted. "But he never did send a posse for me before—like a truant officer to make me go to school. That all, Mizzou?"

Mizzou couldn't face young Jim. His eyes were shifty. He said, "Your old man didn't know you was down here. 'Least, I hope so. Uh—" He was evasive—"that nester filly don't have to hide in the woods. We ain't going to hurt her."

Jim turned his head. "Okay, Linda!" he shouted.

The girl came toward them. Jim watched every step she took. It seemed that she moved with an infinite, God-given grace, unlike anything he had ever seen before, her long dress switching around her ankles and bare feet. Yessir, he said to himself, after tonight there'd be no difference between cowfolks and nesters. They'd all be one happy family—all in one happy corral.

"These fellers come to take me home, like I was a bad boy," he said. "Tell 'em I learnt my lessons good today, ma'am."

The girl did not smile or joke with him now. She halted so that Jim was between her and Mizzou. A flicker of fear lifted the dark brows above her blue eyes.

"Your old man don't seem to be at home, miss," Mizzou said.

"No," she said quickly. "He—he went up to Culley's today. He's giving Culley a hand with building a corncrib."

"Give him my regards," Mizzou said.

"I will," the girl promised.

Her voice had become shaky, and Jim was dizzy from looking back and forth from the girl to the cowboy.

"Come on, Frijole!" Mizzou shouted. "We're driftin'."

The second cowboy, a Mexican vaquero who was also an old-timer on the Angle, came through the house and swung into the saddle. Mizzou stepped aboard his own horse. Jim smiled easily down on the girl.

"These fellers are in an almighty hurry," he said. "Don't worry, kid. My old man's not going to bother you no more. By tomorrow we'll have everything fixed fine."

He did not notice the queer curiosity on the faces of his two cowboys, nor did he think of the bit of fear that flattened the girl's lips when she tried to smile back to him.

"I won't worry, Jim," she said.

Jim reared his horse. He trotted from the yard down Skeleton Branch to the place where it flowed sluggishly into the larger Pecan Creek. He halted there and let his horse drink. The cowboys stopped on each side of him.

"What's the old man got on his mind?" Jim asked Mizzou.

"Not much," Mizzou said. "You were telling that squatter girl that everything would be fixed fine by tomorrow?"

"Sure," Jim said.

"It's fixed today," Mizzou said. "If I was you, Jim, I'd stop talking like that or somebody'll start thinking you fixed it." Mizzou's lips were hard under his thick gray mustache. "Your old man's dead," he announced. "Shot in the back from ambush."

Jim's fingers tightened on the reins until they were white. His other hand, that had been rolling a cigarette, now crushed the corn and tobacco and let the

remains drift like tiny leaves in the fall.

"Where?" Jim asked.

"Up Comanche Gulch."

Comanche Gulch was about half way between Linda Kane's homestead and the farm operated by Pete Culley, where Linda had said her father was helping build a corncrib. One glance at Mizzou and Frijole told him that both cowboys were thinking the same thought as his.

"Still there?" he asked.

"Nope," Mizzou said. "We got a couple of the boys to pack him home. He wrote something in the dirt, Jim. I can't read. But Specks says it said—'Angle's yours, Jimboy, and you can hold it.'"

"I can hold it," Jim said. "Let's go."

## CHAPTER TWO

### A Range Goes to War

JIM SILVER held a meeting of his cowboys. It took three days to gather them in and to find a parson to bury his father. The preacher, curiously enough, was one of his own men who had never admitted to this accomplishment despite the fact that he had always been called Skypilot by the boys because he carried a Bible in his pants pocket on the side opposite from his sixshooter. Now he confessed it so that he could perform the supreme service over this man who had become a legend in his own lifetime.

Jim gathered his boys on the rimrock where it juts out over Rio Rojo above the canyon where the headquarters of the Angle ranch were located. There were close to a hundred men there, young and old, wild and quiet. Some were furtive, as if always looking over their back-trails; some just plain mean. Some of those men were killers. Some were ignorant, and others showed by their accents that they were college bred or that they came from some fine family in the east.

There were a hundred men gathered on the rimrock and Jim looked over their faces to suddenly realize that he did not know a single one of them, that though they would all die for loyalty to the Angle, none was his friend. His friend was being buried by the skypilot.

"Ashes to ashes . . ."

Jim himself handled the shovel as the



sun dropped, cold and yellow, over the llano. He filled in the hole over the pine box that held the hardest man that had ever ridden those plains and canyons. Carefully he rounded off the mound. Then he broke the shovel in two and heaved it far over the edge of the rimrock where he knew it would sink forever in Rio Rojo's pink quicksands.

He stood at the head of his father's grave and made a speech.

"Take a day's ride in any direction," he said, "and your horse will still be eating Angle grass. It's grass that my old man took away from the Comanches and that some of your hombres helped him hold. Maybe it's down on the books as my grass, but it really belongs to the whole bunch of us because we all make our living off it.

"Now I want to tell you something. There are some people taking that grass away from us. One or two—then half a dozen—then a dozen. My old man let the first three or four in because he didn't need all this grass and water. He let them steal a beef now and then because they were hungry. He even let them invite their friends from the East to come out and settle. So what happens? They start showing him off and when he sets down his foot and says 'No more!' they kill him. They shoot him in his back and leave him to die in the dust."

Jim stopped. Never in his life had he made a speech that long. His voice was cracking, his throat dry. Right now he wished that he could take a bottle of whisky and go off into some lonely gulch somewhere and get drunk. He wanted to cry into his whisky and feel sorry for himself. But young Jim Silver could not do that. He had to stand before his men, hard as this reddish rock of the escarpment, and be a symbol to them as his father had been before him.

"I want you boys to go back to ranching," he went on. "You each know your job. Mizzou and me will pick a posse and find the hombre that shot my father. That's all."

It was as if this group was a giant spring and each word from Jim another twist on the handle winding this spring tighter. Now the spring had to give somewhere.

One of the men shouted: "We could

wipe them squatters out easier than squashing stink bugs, Jim."

The whole crowd howled. Jim had to shout with all the power of his great lungs to be heard over the tumult.

"Old Jim wouldn't want it that way," he insisted. "He'd want his boy to take up his job where he left off. And I want you boys to stick to your knitting. If too many of you go on the loose, the Rangers will be in here, and—"

"The hell with them," a vaquero yelled.

The crowd joined them. It was some time before they quieted. Jim still stood before them, both hands above his head pleading for silence.

"It's a free country," he told them. "You can do anything you want to. But I'm still boss of the Angle Rancho and if I hear of any of you bothering a nester or not sticking to his job I'll fire you quicker'n you can spit in a heely monster's eye. And I mean that."

He stood there a moment staring his men into silence. Then he glanced down at the new grave.

"So long, Pa," he said in a whisper.

He wheeled away, his back to the men, and strode alone to the place where the horses were being held. He stepped into the saddle and rode away.



JIM picked his posse with great care. He chose Mizzou and Frijole because they were a pair of hombres who could shoot like Satan, a pair that he could trust to back any play he might make, and to back it right. He chose Specks because he knew that the battle would be fought with more than bullets. Civilization had crept to the fringe of the Rio Rojo country since his old man chased out the Indians. There were laws that had to be considered, and words were the ammunition of the laws. Specks was a man who seemed to know every word there was and most of the laws.

When he had the posse assembled he rode to town. He and Specks rode together. Mizzou led the way by half a mile while Frijole trailed behind. Word had gone out that young Jim Silver was going to do the job his father had failed to accomplish. He was going to clean out the

whole vast tract of land claimed by the Angle rancho until not a single nester remained behind. He was going to do it for keeps—and the only way to stop him was by the same method that had stopped Old Jim.

But nothing happened except that they passed a farmer tooling a wagon loaded with household goods and kids. He was looking around, curious-like, so Jim gave him a bit of advice.

"Keep going," Jim said, "until you cross the Rio Rojo. Then keep on going again for a full day's journey. Watch out for quicksand in the Rio."

"Thanks, mister," the farmer said. "But I'm figuring on camping along here somewhere, soon's I find a nice flat piece of land and water."

"You've just changed your mind," Jim told him. "Congratulations. It's the best thing you ever did for your health. Adios!"

"You can't—" the man started.

Jim did not hear the rest. He touched spurs to horse and the little posse roared on its way. At a fast trot they came up to the ford across Pecan Creek where Jim in better days had often turned easterly to drop in on Linda Kane for a little sparking session. Now they turned easterly, too, but with a more grim purpose, and they rode closer together along the narrow trail that took them to the shanty on Skeleton Branch.

A sharp little spear stabbed Jim's heart as they hove in sight of the cabin. Nearly a week had passed since that day when he had told her that nesters and cattlemen were going to live side by side in peace and mutual aid when once they put his scheme into action—nearly a week since old Jim had been shot in the back from ambush. In all that time Jim had kept her from his mind through a violent force of will power. No more could they be friends.

Specks saw Jim's mind. He guessed the answer and came close to put a hand on Jim's arm while he said. "Maybe we better take the Kane's last."

Jim's eyes had achieved a hardness that would have put his father's to shame. His answer was curt.

"When I want your advice, I'll ask it."

They rode the rest of the distance in

silence. As they trotted into the yard the girl ran from the front door. She had hiked up her wide-skirted dress so that it showed her bare legs nearly to the knees. Apparently she had done this for freedom while she worked, since Jim could see that she had been weeding and cultivating her garden of flowers. As he halted, the spiciness of cooking plum juice dilated his nostrils—and now, for the first time in his life, Jim wanted to run away.

The girl was at his stirrup, reaching up to him, touching his knee and his belt. Jim bit the inside of his lower lip as he looked down. Her blue eyes were darkened with compassion.

"I'm so sorry, Jim."

Jim lifted his eyes from her. He saw the flowers she had planted in her garden, the curtains in the windows. Through the open doorway he could see pictures on the rough walls of the shanty, a cloth on the homemade table. Behind the house, chickens *clucked* in the sun, scratching for feed under the live oaks and pecans that supplied them with half their necessities.

A vegetable garden, green with new corn, lush with pumpkins and watermelon and a dozen other fruits that Jim did not recognize stretched along the creek where the earth was black and rich. Downstream, half a dozen pigs in a corral busied themselves growing fat. Jim saw all these things as if they were a dream. As if it were a dream nearly forgotten he felt the girl's hand on his knee as it trembled.

"Where's your old man?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said. "He—uh—he's been sleeping in the woods lately."

Jim said, "Tell him to pick some other woods." He could not face this girl now. He spoke to the doorway. "Tell him he has until tomorrow at sundown to clear out. If he is seen after then on Angle range he will be shot."

The girl's hand moved off Jim's leg. Because he had to, he glanced down at her. She was still looking up, and the compassion was still in her eyes. But she had grown somehow in the last few minutes.

"I'll tell him," she said. "But he won't leave. Neither will I. This is our home, cowboy."

"Tomorrow—sundown," Jim said.

He tore himself away. He wheeled his horse in such a direction that it would not

knock down the girl and trotted from her yard. He was careful to avoid the flowers as he left. . . .

\* \* \*

They rode on, keeping to the open country as much as possible, scanning the rimrock when they approached Red County Courthouse and were forced to drop down a cut to the low country where the tiny settlement sprawled its ugly half dozen buildings along the river.

They bunched to pass the first false-fronted house and drew up to the Prairie Saloon in one tight group. The three cowboys waited for their boss to step down to the boardwalk. Then Mizzou and Specks joined him. With Mizzou in front and

"All you want," he said to Jim. "On the house. Your father was the finest man this country ever seen or is likely to see."

"Thanks," Jim said. "You caught his killer yet?"

"Why—no—" Stamm said. "Why—gosh—I kinda thought we'd leave that to you. Everybody knows who killed Jim Silver. We thought you'd tended to him long ago."

"I don't know who killed him," Jim said. "And I haven't tended to him. If you know, bring him in. You've got a jail to put him in and a couple deputies eating up county taxes. How about putting them to work?"

"Why—sure," Stamm stuttered.

"Now give me the key to the courthouse," Jim said.

---

**If you like this story you'll want to read more by the same author. Art Lawson has written a swift-moving, deeply penetrating, intensely exciting novel of primitive, untrammelled love out beyond civilization's last outposts—for our companion magazine, RANGELAND ROMANCES. Don't miss "Buffalo Hunter's Sweetheart" in the April roundup of the West's best love stories! April issue now on sale!**

---

Specks behind, they pushed through the swinging doors. Frijole remained outside to watch the horses and street.

Apparently the keeper had been forewarned of Jim's arrival since the saloon seemed deserted. Jim had expected some such welcome. With his two men he tramped across the room, spurs ringing, leather creaking. He stopped at the bar, leaning with elbows on the mahogany and hands in plain view. A moment later the door at the back of the room opened and three men came out, all well known to Jim Silver. Their leader, of medium height and heavy, sported a sheriff's star. The other two had polished up their deputy badges for the occasion.

"Evenin', Stamm," Jim said.

The pale sheriff stopped between the bar and backbar in front of Jim. His two men walked over to a table near the wall and sat down. They picked up some cards that had been sitting there and started a game. The sheriff, who was also owner of the saloon, put a bottle of his best on the bar before Jim.

"I can't do that," Stamm insisted.

Jim did not raise his voice or show any emotion. "At last count," he said, "there were just under one hundred cowboys on my payroll. They'll do just about anything I tell them to. Give me that key or I'll bring the boys down here and carry off your courthouse in one chunk."

"Okay," Stamm said hastily. "I've got witnesses that you forced me into this."

"You'll need them," Jim said.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Battle of Red County Courthouse

STAMM gave him the keys. With his bodyguard, Jim Silver left the saloon. A small crowd had gathered around the front of the door: townfolks, a couple cowboys in for the day, a little bunch of nesters. They stepped aside when Jim came out. The nesters were frightened. The townfolk seemed only curious, excited, as if expecting an explosion that would somehow not touch them.

"We're with you, Jim!" a cowboy shouted.

Jim ignored them all. They went up the courthouse steps and opened the door. It was rather a fancy building for such a town, and the only building in Red County Courthouse of more than one story. Two years before they had let a man out on ten thousand dollars bail, and he had never reappeared, so the county had used the money to build this courthouse. Everybody was vaguely proud of it despite the fact that it was almost useless in a neighborhood operated exclusively by the Angle Ranch and the saloon-keeper, Roy Stamm whom they had made sheriff and general factotum.

"Stamm's gettin' too big for his britches," Jim said to Specks as they climbed the dusty stairs to the courthouse's second floor. "We'll have to hold an election pretty soon and get us a new sheriff. How'd you like the job?"

"Hell," Specks said. "I can't bartend worth nothing."

They entered a door marked LAND OFFICE. In here were the records of homesteads, land grants and so on. Old Jim Silver had always scoffed at this office, claiming that he had taken the land from the Indians and it didn't make no difference what was written down on paper concerning it. Young Jim had a different notion. You could buck nesters easy enough. You could fight your own rustlers. But it was mighty tough sledding when you tried to go against the sovereign state of Texas.

Missou waited at the head of the stairway while Specks and Jim went into the Land Office room. Standing by the windows, Jim watched the small mob in the street below. Specks unlocked drawers and cabinets and searched through them until he found the papers he thought he wanted. These he spread on a table in the center of the room, then sat down to study them intensively through the thick lenses of his eye glasses.

After a while Jim said, "Everybody's just standing around in the street looking worried. Don't know what we're up to. Couple nesters having an argument. Stamm's gone down to the corral with that Pinky Doyle deputy. Reckon his other deputy's keeping the saloon open."

He stopped a while. Then: "Find anything?"

"Seems to be all here," Specks said. "Looks legal to me. Homestead papers for just about everyone of those squatters."

"Then we'll burn them," Jim said. "We'll destroy their papers and run them the hell out of the county. There're enough boys on the Angle to homestead every key half-section from here to hell. If we can't find enough names, we'll make up some."

"My real name is Horace," Specks said. "Horace Smith. I always wanted to be a squatter. Now I can be two squatters—Horace Smith and Specks Angle. I'll never get lonesome that way."

"That's the idea," Jim grinned. He was still watching from the big double window. "Stamm just rode by with his deputy. He's headed toward the Pecan Creek road. Reckon he's going on that man-hunt?"

"May be," Specks shrugged. "But he might be only trying to make it look as if that was what he's up to."

"We'll find out," Jim said. "Make a stack of those nester claim papers—and another bunch for each boy on the Angle to sign twice. Then we'll roll."

"Okay," Specks said.

He began to gather the signed papers he had found in the drawers of the land office. The sun had set while they were in the courthouse and it was getting dark in the room. The mob was dispersing from in front of the courthouse. Jim lit a hanging lamp so Specks could see what he was up to. Then he went back to the window. Everything was quiet outside.

Then Specks suddenly asked, "Say, how long have those Kanes been camping on Skeleton Branch?"

Jim stepped away from the window. "Year—year and a half, more or less."

"Look at this," Specks said.

Jim moved to the table where Specks had been gathering his documents. One of these was the homestead papers to the land where Linda Kane and her father had settled. The original bore a date more than three years old. Since it took three years to win a homestead this meant that someone had forged the Kane papers to give them ownership of the land before the due time had elapsed.

Jim and Specks went through more pa-

pers. Pete Culley's deed was among them, though he had come into this country less than a year ago. The Merrills, the Johnstones, all could show that they had legally proved their claims.

"They must have bought Stamm," Jim said. "He registered these. They must have bribed him. I didn't think he'd have nerve enough to double-cross the Angle."

"Dollars will buy nerve sometimes," Specks said.

"We can use those papers," Jim said excitedly. "We can take 'em down to Austin and prove the whole damn shebang illegal. Hang onto 'em, Specks! I'm going to fetch in Stamm. He knew what we'd find in here. He's high-tailing, not going on a manhunt."

Jim ran from the room. As he rushed past Mizzou and down the stairs he shouted: "Come on, Mizzou."

He ran on through the big front doors and there he stopped a moment to glance up and down the street. Except for Frijole, still waiting with the horses, the village of Red County Courthouse seemed deserted. Mizzou joined him. Somewhere in the night a window squealed as someone opened it and drew Jim's attention to a phenomenon. Except for a glow from the ground floor of the saloon, no lights showed on the opposite side of the street.

"Look out!" Jim snapped.

He dropped like a dead weight. At the same instant a gun barked from the store adjoining the saloon. The bullet whistled past the spot that Jim had just evacuated and chewed a hole in the wall of the courthouse lobby. Then a dozen or more guns all along the street opened up, sending a solid, whining sheet of lead through the doorway while Jim Silver hugged the cold top step of the way leading up from the street. . . .



JIM was missed by the first volley. He lay there and saw Mizzou cut in two. He saw that loyal old cowboy fold in the middle as if he were hinged. Then he was kicked back against the doorjamb where he jerked a couple of times under additional blows before falling forward to sprawl over the steps. Mizzou never reached a gun. He never had any kind of

chance to fight back before his blood spattered the white marble of this gorgeous building and he died there in the place that had been built for justice.

Across the street, Frijole was luckier than Mizzou. He had been there, still watching the horses, and had consequently not been open to so many guns as had Mizzou. Furthermore, when the crowd dispersed from the streets with the coming of night, he had been afraid of trouble and had backed up against the saloon's wall.

But here he might as well have been a prisoner. He could not move without meeting a crossfire. His only way of escape would be via the street because the alleys on both sides of the saloon held gunmen. Crouching there, shaking like an empty can in a wagon, he could see the bright jets of fire as they tripped their triggers.

Jim was trapped, too. In the split second that he remained still he saw that he could never enter that courthouse and make a stand behind its walls. If he humped up, the ambushers would spot him and pick him off like a derby in a shooting gallery. His only escape was the last that they would expect. Even then his chances were so small they were not worth calculating.

But Jim was not a man to think long while bullets screamed about him. He jackknifed himself off the edge of the steps under the rail. Gunmen lowered their rifles, showering him with marble dust. For a moment he crouched low, out of sight. He drew both guns, dug his toes into the gravel, and sprinted for the saloon.

Frijole began to shout in obscene Spanish. From the second floor of the courthouse Specks opened up with his pistol. Though he never had been able to shoot worth a damn, he cleared out the nearest alley for a moment and drew most of the return fire of the ambushers. Then they spotted Jim. Three men were suddenly in the street. Jim opened fire; two men went down, the third ran. All about him was the whine of slugs. One bullet knocked his hat askew. A second seemed to take a grip on his leg as if it were a giant hand. It lifted him from his feet, flung him down on his face in the hard road, stunning him.

Now he was enveloped in an inferno of lead that seemed solid as a wall when he tried to get up. He stumbled another pace, fell forward to roll up against the boardwalk under the hoofs of his frightened horses. He thought his leg had been broken. But he found that only his big silver spur had been hit. The bullet had bent it, and his foot had been numbed by the blow.

He lay there a moment, gasping for breath, trying to settle his nerves. Specks had been silenced in the courthouse. The thinner scent of woodsmoke mingled with the acrid odor of burning powder. A flickering light glowed behind the shutters of the ground floor of the courthouse. It was then that Jim realized how carefully thought out had been the ambush. That fire must have been set before he and Mizzou came down from the Land Office. It had been readied to smoke them out in case they decided to make a stand inside the structure.

They had never had a chance. Luck was running out.

Jim stuck his head over the edge of the boardwalk to find that he was looking into the blackened doorway of the saloon. The light had been doused since the battle started, indicating that someone was probably inside there. But Jim could not stay around any longer. Only Frijole was left with him, continuing to cling to the saloon wall. If either were to get away they had to take the supreme chance right now.

"Take the road east, Beans," he whispered hoarsely. "I'll take the west. Take two horses and stay on the boardwalk. Git!"

As he had expected, a gunnie had been posted in the saloon. This hombre fired point-blank for Jim Silver's voice and his bullet skinned Jim's cheek.

Jim shot back, a quick volley with his right-hand gun, spitting three bullets with steady sound. As he did so he came to his knees, to his feet. He leaped aboard the nearest horse, slashed at it with his spurs as he reached for the reins of the second mount. The horse screamed in sudden fury. He jumped up on the boardwalk, stuck his nose to the west, and headed out of town with a terrible clatter. The second horse trailed behind for a while until a bullet found him and the

jerk on the reins as he stumbled and died almost yanked Jim from the saddle.

Now the ambushers were running into the street to get a line on Jim and Frijole while the two Angle men sprayed every alley and building with lead as they roared by. And thus Jim left Red County Courthouse with guns blasting, with bullets hissing angrily at him—with his heart growing harder than iron on a winter's day and twice as cold.

A trickle of blood scalded his cheek. Two more of his men were ready for the grave. When he finally felt safe enough to slow down and glance over his shoulder, the sky glowed red where the fancy courthouse and all its records were being consumed by cracking flames. . . .



**F**RIJOLE got away. He showed up at the Angle headquarters in time to join Jim's second posse which the ranchman led in grim silence to a battle of extermination. When he was through there would not be a homesteader within riding distance of this whole great area that his father had claimed as Angle land.

Jim rode first to the homesteads of the two nesters he had seen in the town mob before the ambush. Evidence showed that they had packed hastily and left the country. One had gone in such a hurry most of his household goods still remained behind. So Jim's men stacked them in the middle of the shack and put the torch to them, and the bright flame did nothing to warm the coldness that was within him.

From there they rode up to the Pecan Creek country, taking each nester as they came to him. They were almost frigidly polite with these farmers and their families. They never raised their voices. They made only one threat.

"This country isn't big enough for both of us," Jim would tell them, "so you're leaving. You can go today with all your stock and dofunnies. Or you can go on foot some time later on with nothing. If we come back and find you here we'll burn everything you got including your overalls—and we'll kill every head of stock—including your dogs."

Occasionally someone would put up an argument. One of the men said, "God,



mister, can't we even take in our harvest? Can't you give us time for that?"

"Your people didn't give my father time to even look around to see who shot him," Jim said. "And the mob in town didn't give Mizzou time to draw a gun—or Specks time to die in the open. Specks never hurt anybody in his life. He wouldn't even slap down a doodle-bug."

He wheeled his horse and rode away at the head of his little posse, his back stiff as a plank, "his jaw set, his lips a hard line as if they had never known how to smile—and his men learned that the hard-boiled old father had been soft as a baby compared with the son.

Systematically, he cleaned out that land, riding day and night through the rich country of the breaks along the Rio Rojo, ordering the nesters out. Some left before he reached them, for a panic had struck them since the awful night at Red County Courthouse—and only one put up a fight. That one was Pete Culley. Pete tried to shoot Jim in the back when Jim was leaving with his posse after warning him to pack up and git.

He missed. Jim's men reached for guns but Jim said, "I'll take care of him."

He reared his mount and rode back to Culley. Though Culley had a rifle in his hands, Jim did not bother to draw his pistols. He rode straight up to the nester who stood in the doorway of his shanty staring at him as if too fascinated to move. Something in the coldness of Jim froze Pete so that Jim could step down from the saddle and take Pete's rifle away from him.

Jim threw the rifle into the house. He grabbed Pete by the front of the shirt and

yanked him away from the threshold. Pete began to yelp.

"I didn't mean to, mister," he finally gasped. "Don't kill me—I didn't have nothing to do with this. The sheriff—"

He gulped into silence. Jim's men had followed him. Without speaking they went about gathering all Culley's goods and threw them into the house.

"What about the sheriff?" Jim asked.

Culley was terrified. "He promised to protect us. He said this was a free—"

"What did you pay him to predate your claim?" Jim asked.

Pete Culley gasped. This question meant nothing at all to him. Jim suddenly became disgusted. He pushed the nester away from him.

"If we see you again anywhere in the Rio Rojo country we'll shoot you on sight." He turned to his men. "Let him have his junk. *Vámonos.*"

Frijole was disappointed that they should ride away without burning this man's possessions. He was even more disappointed when Jim gave the next farmer on the list a leeway of a couple weeks because his wife was sick. For a while it looked to Frijole as if the boss was getting soft. Then, as it eventually had to happen, the posse forded Pecan Creek and turned up Skeleton Branch.

\* \* \*

Jingle of spurs, creek of leather—the tromp of horses' hoofs broke the peacefulness of the yard that was grown with wild flowers and the little shanty that had curtains on the windows and a cloth on the kitchen table. The chickens cackled wildly



and scurried away. Then the girl came to the sunny doorway.

The blue of her eyes was darker than ever. The rise of her breast under the tight-bodied dress was sudden and sharp when she saw Jim Silver there with his posse of hard-case riders. Jim had been too busy to shave during these past few days; too busy to eat much or sleep more than an occasional nap in the saddle. Jim Silver had ridden down a dozen horses while cleaning out the nesters and now it looked as if his next victim would be himself.

His voice was as if grit had become lodged in it.

"I'm late," he told her. "You should have gotten out three days ago—at sunset. Remember?"

"Too well," the girl said. Her shoulders straightened. Her eyes did not waver. "You're the one who must have forgotten. I told you we weren't going to leave."

Jim said, "If there's anything you want in your house, you'd better get it. We're going to burn it. We're going to burn the chicken house and all your wagons and tools. Hop to it."

The girl did not move from the doorway. She said, "There are five of you—and only one of me. You can do what you want—but you won't get me to help."

"Okay," Jim said. "Pile up the stuff, boys."

The men started slowly. They had not met this kind of resistance before and they did not know how to combat it. They set fire to the chicken house first and took to chasing the chickens and shooting them. This stirred up their blood and got them going. They collected tools and implements which they tossed through a smashed window because they did not have nerve enough to push her from the door. They killed two of her pigs before the others escaped into the woods, and their horses trod her flower garden into a morass.

Through all this the girl did not move. Like a statue in a church she stood there, letting her presence rather than her words preach to them. Two dark red blots on her cheeks accentuated the paleness of her face; the expression of her eyes slowly turned from scorn to pity as she

watched these men in a few minutes destroy what she had spent a year and a half building.

Then they were through, all too soon, and the banging of their guns had silenced and the stink of the smoldering hen house filled the yard. Frijole, who had thought his boss was going soft, shuddered as Jim and the girl faced each other. He turned away to bury his emotions in the work and brought a burning ember from the hen-house to complete the job on the shanty. He could not look at the girl now, for he knew that her eyes were following him. He knew that she was speaking to him, even though she did not use his name. She was speaking to all of them. Her voice had the soft penetration of a whisper at midnight.

"You'll wake up at night wanting to scream," she said. "You'll suffer from this—not me. I can rebuild in a year or two—but you never can."

Frijole hesitated. Jim snapped, "Burn it—cowboy."

Frijole tossed his blazing brand into the window. It did not flare up immediately. A wreath of smoke crawled past the girl to rear up like a snake before her. A sudden fury swept her.

"My father never touched yours," she said, "but you had him shot. I never hurt you—but you do this to me. You're inhuman. You're not the Jim Silver who talked of living together with the homesteaders. You're not the Jim Silver who kissed me in the wild plum thicket. You're not the man I loved. You're a beast, Jim Silver."

The flames were taking now. The curtain by the window went up in a sudden little burst of brightness. The crackling sound had become audible.

"I didn't know about your father," Jim said.

The girl stepped back into the burning room. There was a shotgun over the door, the same gun that her father had often used to chase off Jim Silver when he came courting. She brought it to bear on the posse that stood like sticks in her ruined flower garden.

"Get out," she whispered. Then she shouted. "Get out!"

The gun trembled. It let go with a terrific roar and a concentrated bunch of

buckshot like a whole hive of bees whined past Jim Silver's head. A couple of pellets smacked into his shoulder with a deadening bite. But Jim Silver's expression never changed a bit. Stiff in the saddle, he wheeled his horse and rode away down Skeleton Branch.

When he came to the ford, he said, "You fellers can go home. I—uh—I'm going for a little ride. I been feeling kinda hemmed in lately. I need the exercise."

His horse splashed into the clear stream. . . .

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Hell Calls for Showdown

JIM trotted down the empty street of Red County Courthouse, his horse's hoofs kicking up little spurts of the red dust of that country. To his left the once magnificent building was now only a black pile of ruins forming the final resting place of the cowboy known as Specks who wanted to be two nesters if he had to be one—who did not want to live or die alone. To the right was the string of ratty buildings with windows smashed by gunfire the night of the battle. There was the place where he had lain in the dust thinking his end had come. There were the smashed boards in the walk that had been broken when his horse took a header.

The settlement named Red County Courthouse would never recover from the wounds of that battle.

Jim rode up to the Prairie Saloon and swung a leg over the saddle. He strode into the saloon and found it deserted, too. But on the table where a pack of cards stood there were two damp smudges. On the bar was evidence that it had been mopped hastily, and recently. Jim put his elbows on the mahogany.

"How about a drink, Bartender?" he said in a normal voice.

He was not disappointed. Roy Stamm came through the back door looking sleepy. Recognizing Jim, his face suddenly lighted and he rushed up, one hand extended for a shake. Jim ignored it.

"My gosh, Jim," he said. "I sure am glad to see you. I was afraid them nesters done some damage to you that night. They must have fixed that up right after

I left. I hear they're all pulling out for some other country."

"They must have," Jim agreed, "and I hear the same things you do. I didn't hear, though, where you were that night."

"Why—gosh—" Stamm exclaimed. "I went out to bring in old man Kane—that girl's pa—the feller murdered your father."

"I thought so," Jim said.

He took a deep breath that pressed hard against his chest. The buckshot in his shoulder spread an ache through his back, up his neck and into his head. The cheek that had been scratched in the rush across the street during the night battle began to twitch. Jim did not know when he had ever been so tired as this, or when he had been so little interested in holding a debate with Roy Stamm or anybody else. What he really wanted to do was to kill Stamm right there without further palaver or ceremony. But that was against the code, and, though the code did allow some terrible things, Jim could not deviate from it.

Jim was beginning to suspect that the two deputies who had been playing cards were now loitering about the saloon's front door, ready to shoot him in the back if the boss gave a signal. Briefly he wished he had brought his posse with him. Then he was glad that he hadn't because too many had died already in this civil war of the Rio Rojo country.

Stamm was talking eagerly, talking for time, Jim thought.

"Didn't you hear what happened? We picked him up easy. He was asleep in bed. Half way to town he changed his mind and tried to escape. We tried to stop him. He—uh—he got shot." Stamm grinned broadly. "Save the county expenses, huh, Jim?"

"Sure," Jim said, "and seeing as I am the county—I and the Angle—I reckon I'll save some more money." His eyes narrowed. Stamm was beginning to look frightened. Jim asked, "Just tell me one thing—how come those homestead claims were all predated, Roy? You signed 'em."

"Were they?" Roy asked. "Just a mistake—reckon. Must of got the date wrong. I never was good at dates—or arithmetic." He grinned again in that nervous, fat grin that was like a stone thrown into an alkali pool. "It don't make

any difference anyhow. They're all burned up. The nesters are all dragging their tails, Jim—"

"You run the general store here," Jim said coldly. "You run everything in this town, Roy. You sold a lot of groceries to those nesters. They always pay cash?"

"Sure they did," Stamm said hastily. "'Course, I didn't trust 'em any more'n you did. Why—my gosh—Jim—every thing's fine now, ain't it? Jim—"



JIM was staring at him. Now Jim Silver saw this thing so clearly it might have been printed out there before him in Stamm's colorless eyes. With those homesteads all proved up, with a feud on the range driving the homesteaders away, with them all owing Stamm grocery bills, he could pick up some of the choicest land in the neighborhood for almost nothing.

All he had to do was start the feud going—by ambushing old Jim Silver.

Stamm had begun to sweat.

"I'll give you a better chance than you gave Pa," Jim said. "Reach for a gun, Roy."

Roy Stamm did that. He reached for the gun under the bar. He did not lift it, though. He merely swung it so that the muzzle was pointing to Jim's stomach and, not a foot away, with only a thin mahogany board between them. He tried not to blink or show in any other way what he was doing when he pulled the trigger.

The shot was muffled. Wood splintered. A mule-kick in his thigh sent Jim staggering backward. He stumbled against a table and steadied himself with his left hand that immediately crumpled under him. He was down on his knees before he could draw a gun and Stamm had disappeared.

To make it worse, Stamm's two deputies had shown up. One was at a window, one was at the door, trying to find Jim in the gloomy barroom.

Then Jim spotted Stamm behind the bar, through the hole Stamm had blown in the wood. Somehow it struck him funny and he began to laugh. Almost happily he laughed as the gun bucked in his fist. Roy Stamm fell against the backbar

among a row of bottles arranged there. Still laughing, Jim emptied his gun, finding great pleasure in the crashing, tinkling that followed each shot. Nor did he even try to fight off the other two men. They would kill him, anyway. . . .

Nothing further happened behind the bar. Liquor dripping on broken glass made a curious little sound that was audible even above the roll of gunfire from outside as Stamm's men went into action. Jim closed his eyes.

"I'm sorry—" He almost said, "I'm sorry, God."

Then he opened his eyes again and reached for his left gun so that he could rejoin the battle. He turned the muzzle toward the doorway. It wavered. The pistol dropped from his laxing fingers as barefooted Linda Kane came over the threshold, peering through the gloom, carrying a smoking shotgun and followed by the little cowboy known as Frijole.

"There he is," she gasped. "Oh—Jim!"

Jim said, "Hello."

Then he fell over against the table. . . .



Jim liked to lie in bed on sunny mornings and talk to the girl. He liked to watch her dark hair in the sun, and the sparkle of her eyes. He liked to watch her walk around the room when he sent her on silly errands just so he could see her in motion. Jim liked everything about Linda Kane, who had saved his life by helping Frijole rout the two Stamm killers.

He liked to say to her, "Tell me again about your vision. Maybe it don't rhyme like a poem, but it sounds like one to me."

"I suddenly knew you were still the feller who kissed me in the wild plum thicket, and I had to be with you. That's all. So I came." Then she would smile fleetingly. "I heard you—praying—in the saloon. Then I knew it was not too late—I knew my people could live with yours. The flowers will grow again and you can build a new house. I'll learn how to say 'round-up' and you'll learn how to say 'harvest'."

"You won't make no dirt farmer of me," he said.

She leaned down and kissed him.

By TOM ROAN



Keen fangs were tearing for his throat. . .

## NIGHT of the RED SNOW

*On a drunken wager, John King sacrificed the two prized leaders of his sled-dog team to the searing lash of the toughest bully in that snow-bound gold-camp. But no man's debt could alter the deathless loyalty of those four-legged killers!*

JOHN KING, the Tennessean, was rousing drunk for the first time in his life that night in the town of 49 when he made the bet. His two lead dogs, Watauga, the black sled queen, and Roan Mountain, her great spotted malemute mate, lay asleep behind the huge-bellied stove. They had no way of knowing that the drinking and roaring of laughter at the poker table in the corner was a disarming angle in the slow process of carrying out a plot against their master.

It was warm in the chinked-log North

Star Saloon on the upper reaches of the Yukon. The stove was cherry-red from the great chunks of wood burning inside. The bar along the north side of the room was deserted except when a man or two broke away from the crowd watching the four-handed game in the corner long enough to toss down a drink poured by the man-mountain of fat in a blazing-red mackinaw behind the bar.

Watauga and Roan Mountain were the only dogs in the saloon. Porky Smith did not want dogs in the North Star, but John King was an exception. Any man who had recently struck it rich on Poor Man's Creek, eight miles west of 49, would have been an exception in the North Star.

The rest of King's six-dog team braved the wind outside or lay burrowed in snow drifts to wait for their master's yells. Like most sled dogs, they did not like the idea of entering a house or cabin where there were strange men. But with Watauga and Roan Mountain, it was different. Once they were out of the harness, those two were always at their master's heels unless he ordered it otherwise.

A sleeping black beauty on the hard-packed earthen floor, Watauga opened her right eye and patted her tail when another burst of laughter came from King. Roan Mountain stirred and lifted his head uneasily, a low growl forming in his throat. There was something strange about the tall, shaggy-haired master's voice tonight. Roan Mountain turned his head and looked at his mate. She rolled her eye to look back at him, but the lazy warmth of the stove and the floor kept her still.

Roan Mountain turned back, one eye and an ear still cocked. When John King broke into another spasm of laughter both dogs lifted their heads to look at the group around the table. Something was not right, and the dogs knew it. The laughter was full-throated and wild with delight. Others in the crowd laughed at the same time, some of them clear and hearty, others seemingly as loud with delight as John King's voice.

A thousand men might have heard those gales of laughter without once suspecting anything was amiss. Only the dogs knew. The wolf in the malemute's blood was stirred by something beyond the pale of an ordinary man's ears. The wolf blood

stirred at the same time in the black bitch, and wolf blood was stronger than dog. They arose, shoulder to shoulder, and sat on their hams, watching, prickled by a fear they could not exactly understand but a fear that laid their ears back and caused their lips to curl from time to time.



**"S**H-SHORE, I'll be'cha!" John King's tongue seemed to be twisting words all around in his mouth before letting them out to air. "Yush be'cha. I bet my shirt. Bet my pants. Damn right! Whash yuh got elsh to bet?"

"You're lucky tonight, King." The voice of Bull Kelly, the gambler, was amazingly steady for the number of mixed drinks he had taken. "You've broke Pete an' Clark, but I'll still take one more fling—a high-flier this time, an' I double-dog dare you to call."

A man forever on the go from one place to another, it was said (always behind his back) that no half-decent man or dance-hall molly in all the Far North could lower himself or herself to actually like Bull Kelly. His nickname had originally been Bulldog, which described everything about him except his hands. He stood five feet eleven, and looked as broad and thick as he was tall. Coarse hair, kinky and the color of ripened wheat straw, grew low on his forehead, ending in a V above two little bloodshot piggyish eyes. His jaw was massive and outthrust. His face was round, yet it had a jammed-together look like the fighting face of an English bulldog.

Bull Kelly's hands were a study. They were broad and heavy, yet there was something about them that made men think of a woman. There was a sleek nicety to them that did not go with such a piggyish, all-brute, all-dog face and such a gorilla body. Those who pretended to know said that he rubbed his hands with vaseline and slept with rubber gloves covering them. They were gambler hands, yet not the true sharper's hands. Sometimes they slipped and fumbled a card in the middle of a deal, and then a gun fight or a quick knife affray drove Bull Kelly, trailed by a few ruffian cronies, away to



some place where his name and reputation were not too well known.

John King was the contrast. A six-foot Tennessee hill-billy, a come-easy, go-easy man, he was liked by everybody. His strike on Poor Man's Creek eight weeks before had been the sensation of the camp. "The luck of a cheerful cuss!" men had called it. It had started a stampede. Always a decent, friendly gent, King had done everything he could do to help the late-comers, pointing out places to stake claims where he thought gold might still be found above and below his cabin and frost-rimmed hole in the ground on the creek.

"Well?" Kelly's voice lifted again, low and vibrant. "I said I'd go you for a high-flier. I'm not out of this by a damned sight—not just because Pete and Clark got a touch of cold feet and think they need the air. What do you say, King?"

"Deal 'em!" King's head wagged, a chuckle of laughter coming from him and unsteady hands raking over the big pile of poker chips in front of him. "Yush asked me to play an' started it."

"Not poker this time, King." Bull Kelly's tone was like the cracking of ice. "You've bragged so much about your damned dogs I'd like to prove you a liar."

"Yush callin' me—me a liar?" King's right hand shuffled awkwardly toward a holstered Colt under his mackinaw until a bystander caught his arm. "I won't stand—"

"I ain't called you a liar yet!" Kelly laughed in his face. "You wait until I do—an' don't waggle your damn hand toward that gun again! I'm only offering to lay a little bet. If you're a man you'll call my bluff. If you're a coward you'll cash your chips an' go home!"

The anger that shook the room jarred hard on the ears of Watauga and the big gray and liver-spotted Roan Mountain. Dogs knew by the sound of a voice when a man's fangs were being bared to fight. The two animals came up, tails lowered and ears flat against their heads, when John King started to rise from his chair and men laid quick hands on his shoulders to crowd him back.

When King called them drunkenly the dogs hesitated for the first time since they had come to really know him. King, rock-

ing about in his chair, was like an animal that had been hamstrung on the trail of meat. The familiar snap of his fingers was gone; the movement of his hands was awkward, uncertain. Reeling and rocking badly, eyes bleary, he called twice, and swore the third time. He fell and had to be helped up when the dogs started toward him.

"Shore, I'm bettin'!" he was gabbling. "Theesh pups wouldn't let ol' Johnny down. Huh, boy? Huh, gal?"

The dogs had to hold him up when he flung out his arms to grab them. No other man in all the Far North would have taken that quick liberty. The risk of getting his throat slashed would have been too great. But around the furry necks King's arms swept. He sawed the dogs to him, half-choking them in his tight embrace.

"Growl, damn you, growl!" He laughed at them, rough-housed them, and then broke into a flood of maudlin tears. The dogs licked his face in spite of his breath. Rich man, poor man, drunk or sober, they would go to hell for him. "Yesh, by Gahd! Damn my soul, they'd break their backs for me! They'll wear their feet to the blood, they'll walk their legs off on the trail for me, an' nary a whimper'll come! They're heap yonder better'n some men I've known, an' I wouldn't have to go far to spit on one of them said men. You'll do 'er, boy! Gal, you'll do 'er, won't you now?"

"Come on, then, an' prove it!" snarled the man with the face like a dog. "What the hell is this, a bet or a cryin' jag? Watch that hand, King! That's twice I've told you—an' I'll tell no man about his gun a third time, you tinhorn cry-baby!"



THE wind and snow came whirling in with a roar when they opened the door. It was 50° below outside and getting colder. Midnight had come. Half of 49 was asleep. Joy Gaylen's Place was open across the street, the lights pale yellow squares through windows and doors tightly closed against the cold. There would still be dancing and singing in red-headed Joy's to last out the rest of the night. A *tinkle-twang-twang*

of the piano and a woman's high-pitched voice singing *Let Me Call You Sweet-heart* managed somehow to get outside and live like a whisper in the wind. Other places were still going, the snow-mounded roofs and the dark log walls looking like silver-headed ghosts with yellow eyes squatting in the great listless silence of the northern white all around.

John King fell several times while he was fumbling about trying to get the dogs in the harness. The rest of his team heard his voice and came out of their warm holes in the snow with their tails in the air and their eyes eager. He brushed them aside, not roughly but gently as he always handled dogs, and went on with the work of getting Watauga and Roan Mountain in their traces.

The sled—loaded before King had started to drink—had been standing for hours at the side of the North Star. With his strong hands on the gee-pole, Watauga and Roan Mountain in the past had broken out much heavier loads. Tonight, under the terms of the bet, John King's hand would not touch the gee-pole. The dogs would break it out. He knew that in his heart, yet he was afraid of something going amiss, and cursed himself for his fear.

It was the whiskey, that was it! He cursed himself for that as the cold wiped some of the alcohol fog from his brain. Down on his knees, he fastened the last trace, gave the dogs a last reassuring hug, and then stumbled up and back.

Bull Kelly's voice came then, slurring and sure of itself: "Remember, you're not to lay a hand on pole or trace after they start. That's the bet, an' you'd better be sure not to forget. If you touch you've lost."

"I won't touch." There was still a drunken list in King's voice. "I can still recollect that much. Break it out an' take 'er eight feet, an' that's all my dogs are to do. Stand back, men!" His voice was suddenly flat and hard: "Tighten, Watauga! Come, Roan! Hard to! Gee! Haw! Wrench 'er! Wrench!"

"Put the whip to 'em!" jeered Kelly, bawling at him through his cupped and mittened hands. "Lay it on 'em!"

"You go to hell!" snarled King. "I don't have to beat my dogs to make 'em work for me. Gee! Haw! Wrench—break

—wrench! Haw! Haw! Break it, boy, gal!"

"Sounds like he's plowing a jackass down in Tennessee!" Kelly's laughter soared high above the wind. "That's not a cotton patch, King! That's snow, country fellow!"

"Take 'er, break 'er! Gee, baby gee!"

"Gee-yay 'em, whoa-come 'em, plow-boy!" bawled one of Kelly's friends. "Steer-talk 'em a little"

"Keep out of this!" cried King. "I handle my dogs my own way! *Haw, Watauga! Come with 'er, Roan! Hard! Hard!* Atta boy, atta gal! O, Johanna, I hear 'er crackin' now!"

Hard to it, struggling, fighting for footing, Watauga heard the runners crack and felt the sled move and start to creep forward at the fourth try. A yell went up from some of the crowd. Roan Mountain slipped and fell at that moment, a sharp whimper coming from him. Muscles trembling with strain, Watauga sat back and looked at her master, hurt wonder in her eyes as she tried to understand.

"I think," grumbled the voice of a man, "yore he-dog's snapped a tendon or cracked a joint, King."

"No touch, King!" warned Kelly. "No touch! Remember the terms of the bet or quit cold now."

"I can feel his leg, can't I?" King cried. "When they're not on the pull, can't I?"

"Sure, that's fair!" rumbled the voice of a lanky old sourdough from Number 9 Creek. "Hell, Kelly, yuh don't want a dead or dyin' dog on yore hands, do yuh?"

"Keep out of it!" snapped Kelly. "I don't give a damn whether I have a dead dog or not. All I want is to take some of the high-headedness about his dogs out of John King."

King was already down on his knees in the snow, feeling of Roan Mountain's legs. The malemute licked his face. King ran his hands over him, hugged him, whispered in his ear. Watauga was still trembling when he hugged her to him. He made a slight adjustment in her traces and stumbled back to his feet again.

"Take it, beauties!" King slapped his bare hands, the sealskin mittens forgotten and swinging in the wind from their strings at his sleeves. "Take it away, throw it away!"

Again they were into it, sawing, straining, King's voice coaxing them, begging them, praying to them. At the seventh try the sled runners were cracking ice again. The sled started to move, slowly, inch by inch, the dog's struggling feet beginning to burn, prickle, drip little red blots in the snow. A foot, two, three!

John King was like a man gone crazy. He was down in the snow, on his knees, hands stretching to the sky, then to the laboring dogs—a Tennessee hill-billy praying to his God and dogs alike. Crazy, yes! Crazy as hell, praying like hell, and singing like a fool!

*"O, Johanna, I'm comin' home to die!"*

On, dogs, on! Four feet—and four feet more to go. Muscles straining, feet bleeding, the dogs stopped, staggered, and fell exhausted in their traces.

It was over—and lost. John King let out one fierce wail of despair, and fell in the snow beside his dogs, full-sober now, a strong man weeping without shame in front of strong men.

"Where's that damn lazy, good-for-nothin' Indian of mine?" cackled Kelly. "Somebody send the lousy beggar here to take charge of these two dogs!"

♦ ♦ ♦

KELLY and Porky Smith were the first to get back inside the North Star. Behind the bar Smith threw himself out of his furs, then looked at Kelly with blazing hatred in his eyes.

"That was the most heartless, cold-blooded, dirty deal I ever saw, Bull."

"Keep your thick-lipped mouth shut, you bloated boar!" snapped the gambler. "You're in on this as much as me. You loaded his drinks. You made mine weak."

"I know." Smith expelled a long breath through his teeth, his pudgy hands gripping the drain trough of the bar until they were white. "An' your damned Indian kept sneakin' out the back way to pour water around that sled for a good two hours to freeze it in. Not content with that, you had 'im set a log of firewood in the ground an' ice that in. Them dogs woulda made it if the sled hadn't struck that log. By God, it ain't no wonder you stink to men, Bull Kelly. Your mother musta been a skunk."

"An' my father a rattlesnake." Kelly nodded, one side of his ugly face twisting into a grin. "That's how I get by without working. I'm a gambler, fat hog. I made a little deal with you about gettin' in on the ground floor—without workin'—in a certain minin' venture."

"God knows," groaned Smith, "I'll hate the day I first laid eyes on you! You're the meanest, lowest-down chunk of human scum that ever floated north to the Yukon."

"Shut up!" hissed the gambler. "Here they come back."

King was the first inside, still white-faced but as straight as a rod. "Kelly," he said, name your price for the dogs. If it's a thousan' apiece I'll not whimper."

Kelly looked at him with a leer. "King, there ain't enough money from Lower California to the North Pole to buy 'em. I wouldn't give four hairs out of their tails to keep my own mother from goin' blind. I'm goin' to need good dogs. I'm goin' out to find a gold mine, unless—" a grin sawed across his face. "—I can find somebody who wants a pardner. By the way, aren't you gettin' lonesome up there at your rich hole on Poor Man's Creek?"

"So that's your game?" King's voice was calm, his face long, milky. "You carry a couple of guns on you, Kelly, an' a knife, too, I'm told. You're supposed to be a prizefighter, to boot. How do you want to settle this, fist and' skull, knife or gun? Somebody's goin' to get whipped or die!"

"You Tennessee clod-hopper!" snarled Kelly. "No damned hill-billy clown can threaten my life!"

He had not yet taken off his furs. Standing facing the bar, both hands on the rail, he swerved to one side, whipping a slender pistol from his left sleeve. A shot roared, and John King staggered from surprise and the sudden impact of a ball of lead. . . .

\* \* \*

Popeye, the one-eyed Siwash, had turned the two dogs into one of Porky Smith's wire-fenced runs behind the North Star. John King had had to help the Siwash with the dogs. A word from their master and they were quiet, though they would have torn the Indian's hands off had

he laid a finger on the harness without King being there beside them.

Bewildered as they were, the worn-out dogs dropped flat on their bellies in the snow as soon as the Siwash closed the gate. It was not the first time they had been left in one of the runs. Many men used those runs to keep their dogs from fighting with other sled teams. It was one of the chief assets of the North Star. Men left their dogs here while in 49 on rounds of buying and trading, and in appreciation for his thoughtfulness it was only a natural thing for them to buy their camp and whiskey supplies from Smith—a man who overlooked no bets in the keen competition of trade.

Popeye's mistake lay in the fact that he left the dogs in the first run he came to. It was just behind a low window that looked into the North Star. With the Indian's back turned, Roan Mountain was the first to rise and investigate his surroundings. The light pouring through the window attracted him, and soon Watauga was there beside him. Both dogs stood with their forefeet on the sill, their tongues still lolling from the fierce effort they had made trying to dislodge the sled and move it the required distance.



THE frost was thick on the window panes, yet the dogs could see through it from the windy darkness outside. It was not a clear picture, yet it was enough for them to recognize John King, in the light of the big oil lamps. Their tails wagged, ears sharpening and eyes brightening—until the man with the face of a dog swung back from the bar and fired his pistol at King's chest.

Any dog—any wild thing—knew the meaning of a shot. These two saw their master stagger and go down to one knee. The man with the face like a dog rushed him, pistol upflung as a club to strike. King's hand shot up, warding off the blow. Suddenly they were both on the floor, fighting like two bears mauling and pawing each other, feet and knees working furiously.

Watauga whimpered, then growled, a fierce glint burning in her eyes. She watched the men come up, square off, both

hampered by their thick furs. The dog-faced man weaved in, head down, fists lashing clubs, the pistol now on the floor. King went down under the sudden impact of blows. It was a sprawling fall, and the dog-faced man leaped for him, smashing down on his chest with both feet, and then he, himself, was thrown sprawling as King caught him by the legs and gave them a fierce twist.

Again Watauga whimpered, growled, every bristle lifted. Back in that wolf-dog brain flashed a picture of John King coming to help her with whip and club one raw winter night when two bitch-wolves had her down in the snow. She looked at Roan Mountain. Not a sound was coming from him. He was looking, just looking, all wolf-devil, with the light through the window full upon his snarling face.

King and the man with the dog face were up once more. In the dog-faced man's right hand now was something bright. That thing was a knife! A man yelled something behind him and started forward, hands uplifted and crying for fair play. A chair from behind crashed on that man's head. Suddenly it looked as if the whole North Star Saloon was in the fight, with all men except the bartender taking sides.

As an African lioness or a bitch-wolf always leads the male to the attack, Watauga swung back, took a run for it, and smashed through the window like a black torpedo. Roan Mountain followed her, a yell of warning coming from the man-mountain behind the bar.

John King was on the floor on his hands and knees. The dog-faced man was above him, knife already bloody. At the sight of the dogs he wheeled, leaped to the bar and over it. The dogs shot on to their master, crowding around him, tails down now, ears mean and flat against the sides of their heads. For the moment their coming had thrown the room into a standstill.

"Now, by God, I'll shoot both of 'em!" snarled the dog-faced man, reaching for a Colt under his furs.

"Shoot—and die!" shrilled a voice. "Shoot and die, you white-livered murderer!"

The front door had swung open. A tall, red-headed woman stood there, gaudy in her frills, pale hell behind her rouge—

a two-legged female-wolf now in the fray with a nickel-plated Smith & Wesson in her hand. Behind her, faces grim—some drunk, some sober, some fighting mad and some plain scared—loomed a mob that had been making a night of it in Joy Gaylen's Place.

"Duck it, fool!" whisper-snarled the man-mountain with the shaved hog face. "They'll lynch you if you don't! I—I'll try to talk some sense into Joy's head. Damn it, you know she's in love with King."

The dog-faced man wheeled, a rushing bull heading for the back door. He reached it, a shot tearing after him, and was gone into the cold. A mob wheeled around the front of the building, following him. The dogs watched it all, standing there, backed rump to rump against their master on the floor, daring anyone to come near. . . .

"Watauga! Roan Mountain! *Speak to them, John!*" It was the tall red-haired woman from the place across the way.

Every bristle raised, feet set for the lunge, Watauga faced the woman. *So near, woman! No farther!* And there was Roan Mountain, at the wolf-dog's side, slightly behind, the bitch to charge, the male to follow in like a spotted flash. Under their feet the blood was pooling. John King was lying on his face.

"Easy, Miss Joy!" hissed a bearded sourdough from Whiskey Creek. "Don't go no closer. My God, woman, can't yuh see they're set to kill!"

"We've got to shoot 'em," whispered a burly red-beard from Ten Mile Bend. "There may be some life left in John. Wait, Miss Joy. Tom Jones an' Link Parker are the best shots—"

"Don't!" The woman raised her hand. "Don't hurt them. They should know me, God knows!" Then, to the dogs, voice desperate: "Watauga! Roan! Easy, girl. Easy, boy. It's Joy. Come to Joy. Please, dog, please!"

She was down on her knees, crawling, voice still whispering, one hand held out, Watauga's bared fangs and black bullet eyes facing her. Growls were filling the room from both dogs, and yet the woman came on, still coaxing, unmindful of the filth and tobacco spittle on the earth floor spoiling her fine frills. She put her hand out slowly, straight toward Wa-

tauga's snarling face. Watauga gave no ground. The hand eased on down, gently, ever so lightly. It touched the wolf-dog head. Instead of slashing it to bloody ribbons of torn flesh and broken bones, Watauga's snarl faltered, a growl losing itself into a whimper.

"Well, by God!" groaned a miner, expelling a long-held sigh of relief. "Miss Joy's got more guts than any man in Alaska! I bar none an' can whop the man who says she ain't."



**P**LUNGING through the cold, knocked off his feet twice by the wind, Bull Kelly was eighty rods from the North Star before he realized that he had lost his cap. It must have fallen off, he guessed, when he became caught in the infernal tangle of dog runs behind the saloon and had to drag himself over the fences and through the drifts banked against them.

His furs were of the light "town" variety. A man needed heavy stuff for this weather. His hair was thick and wiry, but he wore it rather close-cropped, and his head was already feeling as if a cake of ice were gathering around it. A man could die in this weather, die quick. Besides, it was getting colder every minute. Where it had been 50° below zero only a short while ago it might be nearing 60° below by this time.

The mob that had come swarming around the side of the North Star from the front would never catch him. It would be just too bad if they did. John King had too many infernal friends in town, and they would not hesitate to string up his killer. But they would not catch him, Kelly knew. The wheeling and funneling whirlpools of snow in this wind would cover his tracks.

Save for the fact that he was hatless and his furs were light, Bull Kelly could laugh at the angry men back there. All his life he had been getting into scrapes like this. Nobody was going to shove him around! People had always tried it, damn them! When he'd been a boy in the stockyard districts of an eastern city, kids had tacked the name of Bulldog on him because of his funny face. He had whipped

them then, cracking a skull before he was fifteen with a baseball bat in McGinty's backyard, and people were still trying to push him around!

The bloody knife was still in his hand, twelve inches of good steel that had tasted blood often before. The weight of the stubby-nosed .45 in its holster against his right side had a secure feel to it. A quick weapon, that, for quick play. He slowed his pace, then swung quickly behind a low fir mantled with ice when he realized that, after all, there was somebody behind him.

Without knowing it he held his breath until he was certain that it was only one man. It was a vague figure, coming with head down in the wind. Kelly's grip tightened on the stout hilt of the knife. The roar of the sawed-down Colt would be a give-away. A knife was quiet. Bull Kelly had used that steel once in a dark little alley thirty feet from the front door of a police station. A man had died even while the bulls were changing shift, and nobody had known that death had been done until the body was found the next morning. Suckers!

The man coming toward him was following his footsteps in the snow. Kelly had not thought that would be possible. Footprints in this weather were filled almost as quickly as one dropped them, and yet here was one smart 49 aleck who was following him with the ease of a wolf on a trail. It would be the last trail that hound ever followed. Too, probably this would be a chance to get heavier furs.

Kelly slid on around the tree. Swiftly he came in from behind, the wind muffling the sound of his cautious steps. It was like striking at a pale shadow.

The knife drove home, hilt-deep after a slight glance on a bone, and a man was down and dying in the snow.

An oath twisted from one side of Kelly's mouth a second later. Then his voice became an excited gabble: "Cripes, Hoop Gunter, I didn't know it was you! Why didn't I think you might try to follow me!"

Dying, the man rolled over on his back as the knife was jerked free. He was a burly fellow, well-clothed, a man who had trailed Kelly from one town and camp to another for the past seven months. A

simple-minded fellow, this Hoop Gunter, and yet Kelly had liked him as a man might like a half-witted servant who was not to be trusted with too many secrets.

"I followed—" Gunter was trying to get it out fast—"to tell yuh not—to go to that young Indian squaw's place on—the river. The mob's headin' that way now. They'll string—string—"

"Go on!" snarled Kelly, poking him with the toe of his heavy boot. "Get it out, you damned fool! You—" He caught himself, staring down in the upturned face. "Gawd," he muttered, "he went out fast!"

He took the dead man's coat and cap. His knife back in its sheath, he pushed on, leaving the snow to bury his victim where he lay. It was too bad that things like that sometimes had to happen. But Gunter had saved him. Kelly had been thinking about making a swing around to that Indian hut on the river east of 49. Now he would shift his course. He stopped again and pounded his hands.

A man was a fool to buck this cold wind and snow, and Bull Kelly was no fool! If the mob was heading for the river, then 49, itself, would be as safe a place as any until the excitement died down a little. In the morning it would be colder. After hours and hours of tramping in this snow, people would be hugging their stoves and fireplaces, just as they had hugged them in other places while Bull Kelly was making his get-away. Being smart paid high dividends.



FOR a week during his every waking hour, Porky Smith kept both ears bent for news and hoped for the best, both for himself and John King. The best for Porky Smith would be to see a dog-team coming into town with the body of Bull Kelly on the sled. Porky Smith would poke him with his finger, maybe even pry up the stiff eyelids to see the color of his eyes, and then he would know he could sleep soundly at night.

John King was in good care—better, Porky reckoned, than most men up and down the Yukon had ever heard about. He was in the hands of the cleanest, whitest woman that ever set foot on a ship in



Seattle for the North. Half the men on the Yukon would die for her at the drop of a hat. Joy Gaylen had grub-staked any number of men, taking them for face value. Sometimes worn-out men came back with a handful of gold. She laughed at them, flashing that sparkling diamond she wore in one of her teeth, when they tried to divide it, and grub-staked them again when they were down and out. Joy was a real woman.

John King was one of the few men she had never staked, but John would marry her, after this. And what fool would not? Any man in Alaska would jump at the chance! John was in her bed in the place across the street. He was still weak from loss of blood, but Joy was bringing him back around the bend.

Hope that Bull Kelly was dead grew in Porky Smith until the morning of the eighth day after the stabbing and shooting. He closed and bolted his doors, then blew out the lights and turned to the little side room where he slept and cooked his meals. It had been a long day, a long grind, and it was still several hours before it would be light.

Porky was half-asleep when he stepped into that side room and struck a match. The flare of the match jerked him wide awake. There on a brandy keg beside the big kitchen range sat Kelly, bearded like a hobo but otherwise in a state of robust health.

"Good God!" groaned Smith. "I thought—hoped—you'd died!"

"Think I don't know you hoped that?" Kelly shrugged and smirked in the matchlight. "Put that match to the lamp, then bring in a bottle of your best hooch. Big bottle of ginger ale with it. Yes, an' cracked ice. I drink in style. Cigars, too. Well, what the hell's the stall? Speak up, damn it!"

"I was just thinkin'." Smith shrugged wearily. "God ain't very kind to me. If He was you'd be dead out there in the cold. They found Hoop Gunter's body where you left him knifed to death in the snow."

"That got anything to do with your gettin' what I asked for, fat man?" Kelly rose, right hand tight on the butt of the stubby-nosed Colt in his pocket. "Get it—an' shut up! Don't stand there thinkin'

I've forgot about your past just because I'm temporarily in a little jam. You killed a politician in Iowa, you know. Damned if you don't remind me of Iowa, too." He jammed himself back on the keg. "You're built just like the fat hogs they raise. If they take you back there to hang you I'll bet every porker in the state'll want to come to the damned funeral."

"I could kill you, Kelly." Smith told him that after he returned from the barroom, with his arms laden. "God knows—"

"That you haven't the guts!" Kelly poured himself a drink. "How's that Tennessee hick gettin' along?" He tossed this one off straight.

"Good. Better ever' hour. Where've you been hidin'?"

"In Joy Gaylen's fine house on the hill east of town." Kelly looked at him with twinkling lights in his eyes. "Ain't that a laugh, them huntin' me high an' low, Joy likely offerin' to grub-stake any old bat that could bring me in, and me livin' like a—"

"Yes, it's right funny." Smith laughed wearily. "Wonder they didn't think about the house, closed up as Joy keeps it at this time of the year. It was cold, though?"

"Good oil stove in the kitchen," grinned Kelly, "an' no smoke. Big Virginia hams in that basement she's got under the house. Bet it's the only basement in the country. Plenty to eat an' drink. Nothin' to do but read books an' sleep in her big brass bed."

"What are you goin' to do now?" Smith asked.

"Finish killin' John King." For the moment Kelly's eyes were wild.

"My God, man, why?" Smith's eyes bulged in their sockets. "You're crazy! The whole town knows now how Popeye planted that log an' poured that water to freeze down the runners solid. They woulda lynched Popeye if it hadn't been because they know he's simple-minded. But—but why kill John?"

"I hate John King!" Kelly's piggish little eyes glittered wildly. "When I hate a man, I kill 'im. Yes, mostly because of Joy. She wouldn't let me set foot in her dump!" There was a short silence. Then:

"I know just how I'm goin' to do it. I'm on my way there. The joint was closin' up when I slipped in here. Man, it'll set the town afire!"



IT WAS still dark and still snowing when Bull Kelly left Smith. In a decent country it would have been daylight long ago. But this was what he wanted. There was not a man or a light in sight anywhere, and Smith had told Kelly all he needed to know. Only the barroom of Joy's Place would be locked. People in this country did not believe in locks. The hotel part of the Place would be open—and John King would be back there on the ground floor.

He opened the door noiselessly and slid into the hallway. He moved on like a shadow, one hand on the wall to his right. As he passed the stairway to his left that led to the second floor and his eyes grew used to the hall he could discern a faint hint of light coming to him from under the crack of the last door to the right. That would be the room! John King would be in that room.

No thief ever opened a door more lightly. Not a sound came from the hinges. He moved on, Colt in hand, eyes on a pale face in the huge bed in front of him. John King was asleep and alone! Kelly's eyes glittered.

A little glass lamp burned like a mere spark on a table drawn up beside the bed to King's left. Kelly reached the foot of the bed and stopped.

King moved, his right hand going to the lamp to turn up the wick. "That you, Joy?"

"Sure!" whispered Kelly. "Ain't I beautiful? A little lower with that light, King. An' no noise out of you. Keep your hands on top of the blankets. You might have a gun under your pillow. Be careful."

"So it's you?" King was not afraid; no, not even when looking at the cold black muzzle of a .45 staring him in the face. "Some thought you might be crazy enough to come back. I said you weren't fool enough for that." King's breathing was heavy but even.

"Quiet!" Kelly moved back quickly,

planting himself against the wall. Something had caught his keen ears. He stood tense and waiting, one eye on King, the other on the door. King's dogs, he knew, were out back. He had questioned Smith thoroughly about that.

The door opened gently. Joy Gaylen came into the room with a small, low-burning lamp in her hand. Her eyes met King's, and he tried to flash her a warning.

Bull Kelly stopped that by sliding forward, his Colt weaving from King to the woman. He spoke, his voice a low rasp that would not carry any more than ten feet:

"Come on in, beautiful, the water's just fine."

"So you did come!" Joy Gaylen was so cool it was a shock. "We said you would, Bull. We—we—"

She halted, stiffening, a shiver running down her back. Bull Kelly heard a door squeak, felt cold air coming in the room behind the woman. There was a back door to that hall, and it had opened. An instant later Kelly heard something moving softly out there. . . .

"Damn you, who let the dogs in?" Kelly grated.

Even as Kelly screeched the Colt roared, sending a wild shot at the woman. It missed her by a foot and brought a shower of flying splinters from the jamb of the door.

Joy Gaylen hurled her lamp straight for Kelly's head. Unhurt, she dropped, screaming at the top of her voice:

"Get him, dogs!"

"You!" Kelly sent a shot crashing at the bed as John King hurled the bedside light at him. The lamp struck the Colt, shattering into bits, and the shot was a clean miss.

Before Kelly could fire again a hairy object struck him, wrapping itself around his head and shoulders. He did not know that Joy Gaylen in her desperation had thrown a small fur floor mat at him. In his madness to fight it off he let the Colt slip to go dropping to the floor with a clatter.

"Get him, dogs!"

Joy Gaylen was screaming again. Kelly could hear other voices, shouts awakening the hotel. In a wild frenzy he wheeled

to the window. With a furious crash of his whole weight against it, he went through, stumbled, and fell out, arms and legs pistoning.

He came up, clawing for his knife. Black lightning was upon him before he could get the knife, and right behind that black lightning was a mottled hulk—Watauga and Roan Mountain coming in for the kill!

"Get him, Watauga! Roan Mountain!" John King was calling now. "Get him, bullies! *Tear him down, throw him away!*"

They came, all of them, out of the cold and into the fight in that little back yard with its sod-roofed stables behind the Place. Bull Kelly went down, when he came up, keen fangs were tearing for his throat, ripping his hands, slashing at his legs. In the mad whirl of man and dogs, the fight drove on to the gate leading to the little back porch of the Place. Kelly smashed the gate with his own weight. He got through, went down, came up, and was downed again by the open door to the hall. The dogs literally picked him up and

hurled him back to make tearing room for them all.

♦ ♦ ♦

"**B**EAT anything I ever saw, gents." Porky Smith was in a happy mood when he opened the North Star Saloon at noon. He was setting out free drinks.

"God, what a mess! Not enough left in one piece to bait a fishin' hook. They ripped him to hell and gone.

"An' what a foolin' Bull got in his own undertakin'. The back door had a loose latch. It just happened to blow open when Joy slipped down to look in on John. A piece of paper comes slidin' along the floor. Bull thinks she's let the dogs in an' he starts yellin' about 'em. Joy an' John caught the point an' just helped 'im out in his yellin', an' out the window goes Bull, right into real dogs. And, boys, what a reception he got!

"That's right, folks. Belly up for another on the house. . . . It won't cost you boys a dime. . . ."



## TWO GREAT BOOK-LENGTH NOVELS!

Walt Coburn leads off this month with a rip-snorting action story of swash-buckling adventure in Mexican bandit country! Don't miss this unusual drama of rustlers, Rurales, and Texas soldiers of fortune whose sixguns spat in the face of Destiny as they played both ends against the middle—

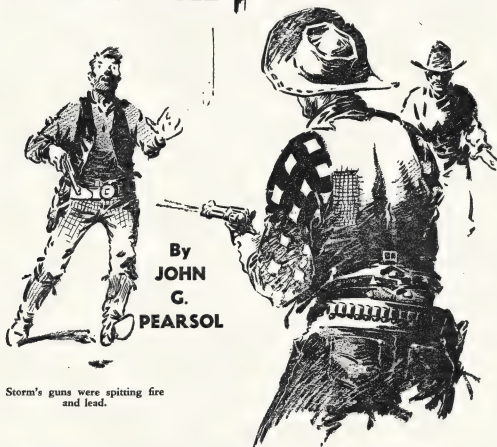
## THE Z LIGHTNING STRIKES

Another great cowboy writer, Fred Gipson, blazes the second long, trap-pitted trail to excitement on a northern range. Be sure to read his stirring, unforgettable novel, "Half Interest In Hell."

Also in the big April issue of *Big-Book Western* you'll find a wide variety of swift shorter fiction of the smoky West by Verne Chute, Dabney Otis Collins, Le Roy Boyd and other leading cowboy writers.

15¢ **BIG-BOOK**  
**WESTERN**  
Now on Sale!

# STAR-TOTING KING OF BOOTHILL



By  
**JOHN  
G.  
PEARSOL**

Storm's guns were spitting fire  
and lead.

*What kind of hombre was Marshal Storm, who scoured the sinkholes of the Painted Rock country on the hunt for a killer pack, knowing all the while that whether he found them or not—his captive button brother must die in outlaw hands!*

**T**HE town of Painted Rock was tough. Big Dan Storm, the town marshal, standing in front of his office, the rays of the setting sun striking crimson from the badge on his vest front, had the satisfaction of knowing he was tougher. He had tamed it. With the exception of the stage robberies occurring out in the hills, there was no violence. Many graves in Boothill had proved to the

would-be fast-handed gunmen in Painted Rock that it was a good idea to believe Dan Storm when he said he was the gun boss.

A hint of worry in his deep-set gray eyes, Storm watched the trail to the west down which the stage would come. The stage was late—and that usually meant a robbery. A robbery today would mean more to Big Dan than on any other day.

Today his kid brother, Jimmy, was coming to Painted Rock.

In the letter written to him by the old man, Dan's father had said:

You take care of the kid, Dan. He's twelve, but thinks he's big enough to hunt rustlers. He insists on going out on the range alone, with blood in his eye. I'm too old to keep chasing after him. I'm afraid he'll get killed. I know you can keep him in line.

Recalling that letter, a tiny smile played for an instant about Dan Storm's lips. He pictured the kid, with a gun almost as big as himself, out hunting rustlers. Then, abruptly, he pictured a stage hold-up—and the kid dead. The robbers in this particular stretch of country always killed everybody: driver, guard, passengers. They never took a chance on anybody living to identify them.

Big Dan had scoured the hills trying to track them down, but it was like looking for a needle in a haystack. Now the stage was late again. The kid was supposed to be on it. Big Dan Storm felt a touch of fear.

Joe Garr—tall, lean, black-eyed—with the badge of deputy marshal on his fancy vest front, looked at Dan. "There's no use jumpin' at conclusions," Garr said. "The stage might not have been robbed."

Dan said nothing. A dust cloud out on the desert swirled up into sight. "The stage!" A man on the boardwalk yelled.

Storm and Garr moved down to the express office as the big, lumbering vehicle wheeled into town. Suddenly, Big Dan's heart leaped in his breast. The figure atop the driver's seat was not the regular driver. It was a boy of twelve. Jimmy's head was covered with blood, his shirt crimson; he was handling the reins with a stiff, unnatural manner that made Storm know he had a hard time sitting up there.

The stage stopped and Jimmy wrapped the reins about the long brake handle with slow deliberation. Dan Storm climbed up on the wheel and stared at the kid's face. It was very white. When he spoke his voice was weak, a little desperate.

"I didn't see anybody," Jimmy mumbled. "But everybody—inside was killed. The stage jammed in the rocks. I was down under a pile of passengers—all dead. The robbers didn't see me. It—it took a

long time—for me to get the stage loose—after they went away."

The kid's voice faltered. Big Dan Storm reached up for him, but Jimmy shook his head and waved Dan away. "I heard 'em talking," he went on. "One fella called another one Limpy." The kid's face was graying fast. His eyes looked past Dan Storm and he smiled a little. "Dad—he says the—Storms are tough. I—tried to be tough. That Limpy . . . I didn't see him. I . . ." Then he toppled forward.

Big Dan caught him in his arms and pushed his way through the crowd. A man asked, "Did he see the robbers?"

Dan said nothing. Somebody back in the crowd called, "There's a dead woman in here!"

Dan went on into his shack and laid the boy on a cot. Jimmy was unconscious but his wound wasn't dangerous. The kid was exhausted, weak from loss of blood. Dan called the Mexican woman who did his cooking. He stopped the flow of blood in the kid's side, told the woman to stay with him, then went outside and sent a doctor back to look after things right.

Out in the street again, Dan looked over several gunmen who were hanging around; hard cases who got a living by unknown methods. Among them was a gent called Limpy. Limpy Gavin. He was not a cripple; one shoulder hung lower than the other and he walked in a queer, lop-sided shuffle. Like a crab.

Dan walked up to Limpy. "Come up to the office with me, Limpy," he said. "I want to talk to you."

Limpy Gavin hesitated a moment, then walked up the street beside Dan. Joe Garr followed close behind them.

In the marshal's office, Garr lit a lamp to dispel the gathering shadows. Storm watched Limpy's face. "That kid on the driver's seat was my kid brother," he said softly. "He was inside the stage. The robbers didn't see him. He heard one of the robbers call another Limpy. That tags you."



**L**IMPY GAVIN'S black eyes were like a snake's, staring at Storm. "The kid's crazy," he growled. "His mind's gone haywire. I was here in

Pete Hurley's back room all afternoon."

Dan, still staring at Gavin, said to Garr, "Check on that, Joe." Garr went out.

"If you are in it, I don't blame you for lying," Dan told Gavin. "If this is pinned on you, you'd never live to hang. They killed a woman this time. They'd tear you to pieces, a lot of those men out there."

Gavin said, "Hell's bells, there could be a million Limpys!"

Garr came back in the office. "Hurley says Limpy was there all afternoon," he announced.

"Lock Limpy up, anyway," Storm snapped. "I'm going to hold him on suspicion."

Limpy grinned. "You won't get by with this!" he warned. But he preceded Garr in to a cell.

When Garr came back he asked, "Just what did the kid have to say, anyway?"

Dan told him, pacing back and forth across the office floor and frowning.

"Mebby he *was* dreaming," Garr suggested. "A kid like that could imagine a lot of things if he was knocked out by a bullet."

Dan went toward the door. "Maybe he did," he said. "But I'm going to try like hell to make sure."

"Sure," Garr agreed. "Sure, we'll both try."

In Dan's shack the doctor was re-binding Jimmy's wound. When Dan came in he said, "He'll be all right after a while. But he's had a bad shock."

Dan sat down beside the kid and watched him. He frowned, shook his head impatiently, rose and went out to make his way up to the office. Joe Garr was still there and Dan extended his hand and said, "Gimme the key to Gavin's cell. Then you take a walk." Garr gave him the keys. He asked, black eyes shining, "What's up? You gonna let him loose?"

Storm laughed shortly. "Hell, no! I'm gonna make him talk!"

Joe Garr, on the point of speaking, shrugged. Then: "I'd go easy if was you. There could be a lot of gents called Limpy, you know."

Storm smiled. "How many do you know, Joe?" he snapped.

Garr shrugged again. "You're the boss," he said slowly and went out.

Storm took off his gun and hung it on a chair. Back in the corridor he unlocked the iron-strapped door that led into the 'dobe room where Gavin was confined. He locked the door behind him and put the key in his pocket. He smiled wickedly at the light that leaped up suddenly in Gavin's black eyes.

Slowly, Big Dan rolled up his sleeves, his gaze never leaving Limpy Gavin's face.

"In all my life I never met anybody called Limpy except you," he said. "I've heard of some, a couple, maybe. But I never met any. It'd be foolish to think there was somebody else around here called that. Now you start to talk. Who was in it with you?"

Limpy Gavin's face was frozen. There was desperate calculation in his eyes as he watched Storm. He said, "You're crazy as hell!"

The lawman nodded, advanced toward the broad-shouldered, long-armed Gavin. Gratingly, Storm agreed, "Okay. I'm crazy. Who was in it with you?"

"I think I can beat hell out of you," Gavin boasted. "I don't think you're so tough!"

As he said it he lunged forward, a long arm out toward Storm. Dan didn't dodge. The little room was too small for much footwork. He moved forward, letting Gavin's fist hit him on the side of the face, jarring him. Then Storm hit Gavin. He tried to break his neck, so enraged was he when he thought of the dead woman, of Jimmy with the bullet in him. He tried to knock Gavin clear through the 'dobe wall.

He nearly did it. Gavin's feet left the floor. He bounced against the wall, then slithered toward Storm with that one-sided crawl that had earned him his name. Arms flailing, he waded in and got past Dan's hail of blows. He knocked Storm back and grinned. But Dan knocked the grin off his ugly face with a smash in the mouth that rocked his head back as though a horse had kicked him in the face.

Gavin didn't look so cocky now. He was as strong as a mule, but his confidence wasn't so good. He didn't grin. He growled low in his throat as he bored in, raining sledge-hammer blows on Dan. Dan hit him again, as hard as he could. Gavin



fell, lay still for a moment, and Dan Storm reached down and hauled him erect and hit him again. He watched him bounce against the wall and fall to the floor.

He asked, "Who was in it with you?"

Gavin shook his head. He mouthed a curse and spat, "You go to hell!"

Storm reached down and got the man up again. But Gavin couldn't stand, couldn't hold up his arms. He was slack, limp, panting like a spent horse. The officer let him fall to the floor. He promised, "You'll talk. You'll talk because I'm going to do this every day till you do talk!"



DAN STORM went out and locked the door. The office was empty. Storm took his gun and went out the back way, to reach his shack without being seen, because of the blood on him. When he opened the door an old man was sitting near the cot where Jimmy lay. The old man rose and moved toward Dan.

He announced, before Storm had a chance to speak, "I'm Lew Brant. I live down to the livery stable and work for the stage company tendin' the horses. My kid Bud is a hide hunter. He saw the stage bein' robbed. He follered the robbers an' watched 'em take off their masks. He looked for you, but couldn't find you in town. He had to go out again, but says if you'll come down to the stable tomorrow night he'll tell you who it was. They're men from town here."

"Didn't he tell you who they were?" Dan asked.

The old man shook his head. "Bud says what I don't know won't backfire on me. That kid of mine is smart."

"Sure," Dan agreed, "I'll be down to see him tomorrow night. What time will he be in?"

"Any time tomorrow," the old man said. "Mebby early. But he reckoned he better see you after dark. No sense gettin' mixed up in it till all of 'em are in jail."

Young Jimmy opened his eyes when the old man slipped out. Dan stooped over him. "How's tricks, button?"

Jimmy smiled. "I feel fine, Dan. I heard what that old jasper said. I'm glad you're gonna get them fellas. It was—it was pretty awful." Jimmy closed his eyes and

seemed to shiver. Big Dan put a soothing hand on his brow.

"Don't you fret," he said softly. "We'll get 'em."

The Mexican woman came into the room. Big Dan washed his face, put on a clean shirt and went out. He smiled grimly as he thought of old Lew Brant's kid who would tell the names of the men who had robbed the stage and killed the occupants. He was a smart kid. He knew it would be dangerous business testifying against men who would commit such a crime. They would stop at nothing. The kid was wise to keep his old man out of it.

Up at the office, Joe Carr was sitting on the porch watching the now almost empty street. Joe said, "You sure beat merry hell out of Gavin. Did he talk?"

Dan Storm smiled. "He don't have to talk. I have a witness that saw the robbery."

Joe Carr stood up. "Who are they?" he asked quickly.

"I don't know," Storm said. "The witness hasn't told me yet. But they're from town, and I'll arrest them tomorrow night."

Dan went on down the street. As he passed the saloon he began speculating on who the killers might be. If young Jimmy was right about the gent named Limpy, the others would, logically, be men friendly with Limpy. Men friendly to him were in front of the saloon now. Ace Sawyer, Duke Wheeler, Ben Hervey, Tex Langford. They were of as ill-repute as Limpy Gavin. They nodded to Dan. As he said, "Howdy," Storm recalled also that there were plenty of gents in Painted Rock with characters just as shady as these. And as he went on he saw a fellow with a peg-leg get off a horse in front of the livery stable. He was Stumpy Wilson, a man who sold rotgut whiskey to the Indians. Maybe the kid had misunderstood Limpy for Stumpy!

Telling himself that tomorrow he would know, Storm started into the general store, still open, even though it was late. A voice hailed him, "Dan. Wait a minute!"

It was Fancy John Simms, owner of the saloon. "Now listen, Marshal," Simms said angrily, "you'll have to do something about this stage robbery busi-

ness. The miners don't bring their gold here to ship. Consequently, they don't come into my place. I'm losin' money. If you can't handle it, why not step aside and let somebody take over who can?"

Storm was still gazing up the street where Stumpy Wilson was talking to some men. "It'll be all settled tomorrow night, Fancy," he said. "I have a witness who knows them all." Dan quirked his lips in a crooked smile, added sarcastically, "That is, if you can stand the loss of a few more dollars till that time. Of course, the killing of people on the stage don't make any difference!"

Fancy John Simms looked uncomfortable for a moment, then grunted and turned, going up the street. Dan went on into the store and bought young Jimmy a bright-colored, fancy plaid shirt. He grinned happily as he came out and went around the corner of the shack. It was

Jimmy had been taken somewhere, God knew where! That they'd kill him if he didn't tell the witness's name, Dan had no doubt. That they might kill him anyway, he believed possible.

◇ ◇ ◇

**V**AINLY trying to quell the fear within him, he hurried outside. He stopped a drunk that staggered near him, asked, "You see anybody go into that place there?" He pointed to the shack.

The drunk shook his head. He started to speak, but Dan Storm had gone, hurrying toward the street. He met Joe Garr.

Garr said, "Getting late. Reckon I'll turn in."

Storm, sudden suspicion coming to him, touched Garr on the arm, studied his



**Always look for Popular Publications' seal of quality—two P's, back to back—on the magazine you buy. It's your guarantee of satisfaction!**



dark, and he reckoned the kid and the Mexican woman were asleep. He opened the door slowly, cautiously, trying to be quiet. He tip-toed across the room, intending not to light a lamp till he was in the other room, so as not to disturb the kid.

He stumbled over something soft and yielding on the floor. He sprawled down and felt a chill of apprehension sweep through him. He struck a match hastily, and stared at the face of the Mexican woman. She was dead; her head had been beaten in with a gun. Eyes whipping to the cot where Jimmy had lain, he stared at its emptiness. Dan rose hurriedly, lit the lamp, looked at a piece of paper tacked beneath it.

We'll trade even—the kid for the name of the witness. If you want him back in one piece you better do it. You have till tomorrow at sundown. Put the witness's name on a paper on the outside of your door. Then you go up to the office.

It was, of course, unsigned. Dan Storm stared at it for a full moment, his heart pounding like a wild thing. The wounded

black eyes in the dim light of the street. "Did you tell anybody that I had a witness?" he asked.

Joe Garr looked surprised. He said, vehemently, "Hell no! That'd be a damn fool thing to do. Why?"

Dan started to tell him, then stopped. He'd already talked too much. Blabbed like a fool to Joe Garr, to Fancy John Simms. By this time God alone knew how many ears had heard that Dan Storm had a witness against the stage robbers.

Deep misery in him, Dan said, "No reason. I just wondered. Go ahead and go to bed."

Garr went on up the street and Storm went into the saloon. It was nearly empty now. Only one of Limpy Gavin's friends, Tex Langford, was there. Fancy John was at the end of the bar. Dan stopped beside Fancy John. "Who did you tell that I had a witness on that stage robbery today?"

Fancy raised his thin eyebrows in surprise. He said, "What the hell's the matter with you? You look like your favorite uncle had died, not leavin' you a cent!" He started to laugh.

Storm blazed fiercely, "Damn it! Answer me!"

"Why, hell," Fancy snapped, "I told a lot of people. Why not? You didn't say it was a secret!"

Dan Storm said nothing, realizing his own loose tongue was responsible for Jimmy being gone; perhaps responsible for his death; responsible, perhaps, for Storm not being able to capture and bring to justice a bunch of dirty murderers.

He went outside into the darkened street, made his way to the livery. There was no one there and he sat down on a bench in front of the building. The town was quiet and dark. Dan Storm paced up and down, waiting for old man Brent or his son Bud to appear. Before daylight old man Brent came.

"You're early," Brent said. "Bud ain't back yet. He might not git back till late. Anyway, he said he'd ruther see you at night."

"I have to see him right away," Storm said tightly. "Where did he go?"

Old Brent waved an arm toward the hills. He said, "Right now the weather is too warm for wolf and coyote hides to be prime. But the bears are lookin' around for their winter quarters. Bud is up there, after bears. He sells the steaks an' sells the hides. He's—"

Storm was striding up the street. He hurried to the corral behind his shack, saddled a horse and rode furiously away into the gray of dawn that was painting the sky above the peaks. Knowing where the black bears would be more plentiful, he headed for Perdido Peak, sparing neither his horse nor himself till he reached the foothills.

As he climbed he called Bud Brent's name, only one frantic thought hammering at him. Find Bud—get the names of the killers—and before sundown deadline do something to release young Jimmy. Maybe kill them one at a time. Maybe force one of them to tell where they had taken the kid.

But Dan's voice echoed back hollowly to him, mocking him. He climbed higher. Suddenly he stopped as a shot ripped out in the stillness of the hills. Another. Then two more, fast. Dan whirled his horse and raced in the direction from which the shots had come. Another shot sounded

louder, closer. Abruptly, Dan broke through the brush into a tiny clearing. Suddenly his horse began to buck and pitch and snort in fear. A huge black bear was charging toward a young fellow who had just tossed aside an empty gun and was whipping out a long-bladed Bowie knife.

Sensing someone behind him, the man yelled, "Shoot!"

But, terrified at sight of the bear, Dan's horse went berserk, pitching, snorting, squealing. Dan tried for his gun, but the pony unseated him before he touched the gun. He flew over its head and sprawled on the ground, seeing the big, black bear rush toward young Brent.

Suddenly they met. The long, glistening blade of the Bowie sank deep into the shaggy-hided body. The bear roared. With a great sweep of his paw he knocked Brent back. The kid fell and didn't move. Dan Storm rose slowly to his feet, his hand automatically going for his gun. He whipped it up as the bear's big head, eyes red, jaws slaving, turned toward him.

Dan Storm fired, but the bear came on, white-fanged jaws open, red eyes glaring hate. Dan fired again—again. As fast as he could he emptied the gun. The beast's hot, fetid breath was in his face, its bloodred eyes glaring in his own. A raking claw ripped his arm from shoulder to elbow. Dan tried to leap back, ducking toward where the Bowie knife lay on the ground. But he tripped, fell. A huge weight fell on him, almost crushing him. He lay there waiting for the final blow, wondering for a brief moment if he would feel the snap of his neck, or if the huge jaws would close upon him, to make him die slowly.

But nothing happened. The weight atop him did not move. There was no sound. Cautious relief coming to him, Dan moved. Nothing happened. He wriggled out from under the weight, scrambled to his feet. The bear was dead.

Stumbling to where the young man lay, Dan Storm stared at the crumpled heap, at the kid's head twisted to one side, his neck broken. Young Bud Brent would hunt no more bears; would never tell who had taken Jimmy away; would never name the murderous killers who had robbed the stage. . . .

WRAPPING a piece of shirt about the long tear in his arm, Dan found his horse, reins tangled in the brush, a few hundred yards from the clearing. He led it back, loaded the dead man on it and headed back to Painted Rock. As he found the street and headed up its dusty length, all hope left him. He would blame himself when he knew Jimmy had died. He'd talked too much. He'd bragged about something he didn't have in the bag. He was a loose-tongued fool. He was worse than a fool. He was a murderer. His own brother's murderer!

Stopping at the livery, Dan unloaded the body of young Bud Brent. In a hollow monotone he answered the myriad of questions fired at him. He looked at the grief, the stunned horror on the face of old man Brent and knew how he felt. He felt that way also, even before he knew whether Jimmy was dead.

He made his way slowly to his shack. The sun was half way down, its nearness to the peaks filling him with a frantic fear. He recalled the note they had written him: *Put the witness's name on a paper and put it on the outside of your door. Then you go up to the office. . . .*

Dan wrote, "Bud Brent," on a piece of paper and stuck it in a crack on the outside of the door. He went out to the street and into the saloon. He saw the men he suspected of being in cahoots with Limpy: Tex Langford, Ace Sawyer, Duke Wheeler, Ben Hervey. Then he heard the clump of a peg-leg on the board floor of the saloon. Stumpy Wilson came in, his peg-leg reminding Dan that the kid could have been mistaken. Stumpy—Limpy—it would be easy for a kid to get those names mixed.

Dan went out and up to the office. Joe Garr looked at him. "My God!" he rasped. "What happened to you?"

Dan Storm answered, "I had a fight with a bear."

Joe Garr, as though he thought Dan was joshing, laughed. "You look like you came off second best!"

Dan started to say something. He wanted to talk to somebody, Joe Garr, anybody, to tell them about Bud Brent. He wanted to say that Jimmy was gone, that in about an hour a bunch of murderers would kill the kid because he, Dan

Storm, couldn't give them anybody's name but a dead man's. But he didn't say anything. Talking too much had been the trouble. Maybe if he kept his mouth shut somebody would let something slip. Maybe somebody would say, "Too bad Jimmy was kidnapped." Maybe the killers would wonder why he didn't talk and tip their hands.

"I guess I'll go down town a while," Joe Garr said. He looked as though he thought Dan had lied about fighting a bear.

Storm nodded. He recalled that he hadn't reloaded his gun since killing the bear, so he filled the chambers while he sat in the office watching the down town traffic through the window. He found he could move his torn arm. He wondered if he could bluff Limpy Gavin and went in to see him. Limpy stared at him hatefully, his face puffed, bruised, blackened by the beating Dan had given him.

Dan told him evenly, "Right after sundown, I'm going to kill you. I guess you know what I mean."

Limpy's face was stony. Only his eyes were alive with hate. He said huskily, "I wouldn't put it past you."

Dan argued, "You know why you're going to die right after sundown, don't you, Limpy? That is, unless you tell me who robbed the stage!"

Limpy snapped, "You go to hell! I don't know anything."

Dan went out again. He sat by the window. His doubts came again. Limpy. Stumpy. Where was Jimmy? What could Dan Storm do to find him, to save him? The sun was lower. A dead man's name was scrawled on a piece of paper. They'd never believe Bud Brent was the witness.

The sinking sun, it seemed to Dan Storm, literally dove toward the Perdido Peaks. The shadows seemed to race with incredible speed across the flats and up the street. Suddenly it was sundown. Suddenly Dan Storm knew that from this moment on, unless a miracle delivered Jimmy to him, he would be damned in his own eyes—a loose-tongued fool, a blabber-mouthed murderer. Abruptly, it all seemed unreal to him, that he, big, strong, always fighting his way through hell and high water, was now powerless.

As though in a daze Dan Storm looked up at Joe Garr as the tall, black-eyed deputy came into the office. Listening to Garr's voice as though it came from a distance, his ears heard, "I went past your place and saw something stuck in the crack of the door. I looked and found this."

Dan looked up, saw Joe Garr extending an envelope toward him. Slowly Dan tore it open. It was the same piece of paper he had used to write Bud Brent's name on. Below Bud's name was scrawled:

Don't be fool enough to think we'll tumble for such a crazy answer as this. We're not kidding anybody. You got thirty minutes to save your kid brother's life.

Miserable, Dan Storm tore it to bits, threw it away. He stared out the window and heard Joe Garr's voice. "I pushed open the door of your place and saw that Jimmy wasn't there. Is he up and around?"

Dan shook his head. He kept thinking: thirty minutes, thirty minutes. What could he do in thirty minutes?

Suddenly he whipped his head about, filled with cold rage and fire and suspicion. Slowly, softly, watching Joe Garr's eyes, he asked, "What did you see in my place, Joe? Just that Jimmy was gone?"

Joe Garr stared hard at Dan. His face had always been expressionless. Now it didn't change. He said, "What the hell's the matter with you, anyway? Should I have seen anything else?"

DAN STORM placed his hands palm down on the desk top, behind which he sat. His eyes were gray flame. His lips were twisted. His voice had ice in it when he said, "You didn't push open the door, Joe. You didn't look to see if Jimmy was gone. You knew he was gone *without looking!*"

Garr was suddenly full of caution; he took two backward steps toward the open door behind him. Dan said, "You shouldn't have said anything, Joe. You should have let it ride, like I should have let everything ride. Too much talk let you get hold of Jimmy. Now too much talk lets me get him back again!"

Garr eased a hand toward his gun. "You're crazy!" he said. "You talk like a lunatic!"

Dan Storm laughed. "You didn't look," he rasped. "If you had looked you'd have seen a dead woman laying there on the floor. You killed her when you hit her on the head. I didn't move her. I was so wrapped up in trying to get Jimmy back that I didn't give her a thought. She's still there. You didn't know it. You didn't even know you'd killed her when you hit her on the head. If you'd looked in, not knowing Jimmy was gone, you'd have mentioned a dead woman to me, Joe. Wouldn't—"

Abruptly, Joe Garr was all action. He leaped back. His gun came out. He yelled hoarsely, "Use the key, Limpy! He's wise. Get out!"

Dan Storm had to push himself back from the table before he could bring up a gun. As he sprang up he tipped the table up and dropped down behind it. With the roar of Joe Garr's gun he felt the table jar with the shock of the bullet. He pushed it over and snapped a shot at Garr just as he whisked around the door frame. He missed, the bullet chipping splinters just behind Garr. Dan whirled and grinned wolfishly at Limpy Gavin as Limpy appeared in the doorway to the hall, a gun in his hand.

Storm breathed, "Just in time, Limpy," then shot him in the belly.

Limpy fell forward like a horse had kicked him in the stomach. He landed on his head and lay still on the floor. Dan took another gun from the desk drawer. He flexed the fingers of his left hand, tried the feel of the gun in it. Down the street he saw through the window, Langford, Ace Sawyer, all of Limpy's pals pouring out into the street. He heard Joe Garr yelling, "Get Dan Storm! He's wise!"

As Dan stepped onto the porch, a gun in each hand, a bullet buried itself in the door frame. Sawyer, Langford, Duke Wheeler, Joe Garr, all deployed along the street, getting positions near building corners.

Garr snapped a shot at Dan. Dan stepped down off the porch, fired so accurately at Garr that Joe didn't have time to get behind the building corner. The bullet knocked him back, left him lying there, only his brightly polished boots visible to Dan.

The others began to shoot fast, furiously, their lead raining about Storm as he weaved forward, dodging from one building to another, his guns spitting fire and lead at them. Dan was smiling now. All the worry was gone from his deep-set gray eyes. This was his kind of fight; guns roaring, smoke billowing, lead screaming, men dying. Now the waiting, the uncertainty, was over.

They had to show themselves to shoot at him. All he had to do was stay on his own side of the street, keep going. When somebody showed, he shot at him. When he shot, he hit.

Tex Langford popped his head around the corner and Dan was so close to him he saw the startled alarm fly into Langford's eyes. Then a bullet knocked Langford back and Dan went on. Ben Hervey's gun boomed three times in quick and futile desperation. Ben was afraid to get his body out far enough to shoot accurately. Dan shot him in the shoulder, jumped around the corner to where Hervey was groping for the gun which had fallen from his hand.

"Where's the kid?" Dan called. "Hold it, Hervey!"

But fear had its hold too firmly on Hervey. He appeared not to hear as he dove for the gun. Dan shot him again. Then he moved around the corner, marveling vaguely at what fools these men were. If they had rushed him instead of waiting for him, Dan Storm would long ago have been dead.



**D**UKE WHEELER was cagy. He didn't come out from behind his corner to shoot. He waited till Dan came past, then fired. The bullet knocked Dan Storm around, as though a heavy hand had grasped his left shoulder and yanked. But his right gun came up and yammered at Duke before another shot could be fired. Duke dropped his gun, stood very still for a second, then wilted down as though he had no bones in his legs.

At the next corner Dan waited. To Ace Sawyer he called, "I'm coming, Ace!" Then he walked out into the

street so he'd appear, not at the corner, but twenty yards from where Ace would be watching. It gave Dan time to shoot Ace where he wanted to shoot him. He hit him in the shoulder and Ace dropped his gun, but dove for it, and Dan sprayed sand in his eyes with a bullet from in front of his face. He leaped forward, placed a gun a foot from Ace's head. He gritted, "Talk fast, Ace! Where's the kid?"

Naked fear flared in Sawyer's eyes. He said, "Okay, I'll . . ."

Then a gun flamed. A bullet struck Ace Sawyer in the temple. His head bobbed back. He was dead as he relaxed on the ground. Dan Storm whirled. Fancy John Simms stood at the corner of the building, his gun smoking.

"Lucky I was here," he said. "In another second he'd have got that gun. I saved your bacon."

Dan said nothing. He moved slowly toward Fancy John Simms, his gun hanging loosely in his hand. When he stopped in front of Simms, Dan holstered his gun. He said, "Yes. Thanks. Thanks a lot."

John Simms holstered his gun. He smiled. Then Dan Storm hit him. He nearly tore his head off when his big fist whizzed through the air and cracked solidly against Fancy John's jaw. Simms flopped backward. He lay very still. A crowd came out into the street. Dan said to some of the men he knew, "Somewhere in Fancy's place my kid brother must be tied up. Take that place apart and find him while I watch this snake till he wakes up. I want to be sure he talks in case I'm wrong. All these jaspers were in on the stage robberies."

As Fancy John Simms fluttered his eyelids, some men came out of the saloon carrying a boy. It was Jimmy. He looked scared, but he grinned at Dan as they put him down.

Dan watched him anxiously. He asked, "You okay, button? You feel okay?"

Jimmy nodded. He looked at the dead man, at the blood on Dan's shirt. He said, "Sure. The Storms are tough, ain't they?"

Dan Storm reached out and hugged him. All the anxiety went out of his eyes as he said, "You're darn tootin'. The Storms are as tough as they come!"



By JAMES STEVENS

They stood in the center of the floor, slugging it out.



*A dying man's curse  
finally caught up with  
Wild Bill Hickok—*

*because he had broken the strictest  
code of the Old West!*

## WILD BILL— FIGHTING PLAINSMAN

MRS. WELLMAN gathered her long skirts firmly above her ankles and hurriedly ran for the Rock Creek Station of the Overland Stage Company.

It was a hot July day of 1861 in Jefferson County, Nebraska. Beads of perspiration broke out on her smooth, tanned

features, and her lithe body heaved breathlessly as she scampered across the rocky ground.

Young Bill Hickok looked up from his work. He was Mr. Wellman's general flunky around the stage company station. With alarm he caught the look of fright in Mrs. Wellman's eyes, and

with swift, cat-like strides he covered the remaining distance between them.

"They're coming!" she panted.

Bill could feel her tremble as he gripped her shoulders. "Who's coming?" He shook her, trying to get the woman to tell him what had happened.

"The McCandless gang," she said through quivering lips. "My husband's gone, and I haven't got the money that Mr. Wellman owes them. They've threatened to kill us and destroy everything we own unless we pay them."

"Go in the house," Hickok commanded, but the woman was so overcome with fear that Bill had to lead her behind the protection of the frame building.

Then young Bill Hickok, age twenty-four, returned to the front room and waited quietly for the McCandless gang.

Steely blue-gray eyes looked coldly from between blond lashes, and long, silky curls spread down to his broad shoulders. He was tall, about six foot two, and weighed close to a hundred-and-ninety-five pounds.

He had just buckled a pistol around his waist when McCandless himself stepped through the door. Bill knew the gang leader. In fact, he had worked for him at one time.

"Hello McCandless!" His voice was sharp and clipped.

"Where's Wellman?" the gang leader demanded, ignoring Hickok's salutation.

"He's not here now. I'm representing him," the young man answered. "What do you want?"

"I want my money!" the man snapped. "He didn't leave that with you before he ran out did he?"

"No, he didn't leave anything with me—and he didn't run out," Bill said calmly. "If you'll give Wellman time, he'll pay you."

"Say, who are you?" the other man barked. "Last time I knew you you were looking after the horses and mules."

"That isn't what I'm doing today."

"If you're representing Wellman, hand over the money or the gang and I will start wrecking the place—and you with it!" McCandless snapped. His sharp little eyes were gleaming viciously.

"Well, I guess you'd better begin with me," Bill drawled.

Both men went for their guns, but there was only one explosion. McCandless dropped to the floor with a bullet through his heart.

Bill Hickok stepped quickly over the gang leader's body and waited in the shadow of the door. Already he could hear other members of the gang running toward the house.

Woods, McCandless's right hand man, came into view around a bush, and Hickok's revolver roared again. Woods crumpled like an empty sack.

Gordon, third in command, was next. He fell, badly wounded, and the other members of the gang, under deadly fire from Hickok's guns, dragged him to the horses and galloped away.



FROM that day on young Bill Hickok became known as Wild Bill.

Wild Bill Hickok was the most famous of the frontiersmen. When he was fifteen years old he ran away from home, and during the rest of his life he served as almost everything. He was gambler, peace officer, buffalo hunter, Indian fighter, actor, killer and city marshal. He was believed to have killed more men than any other gunman on the American Frontier. Most records credit him with eighty-five notches.

He never picked a fight, but never backed down on one. His real ability, which enabled him to come out winner so many times, was the unbelievable quickness of his draw. Bill could let almost any antagonist get his pistol completely out of the holster and still punch in the first shot.

When it came to firearms, Wild Bill knew all the tricks of the business. One time he was in a North Platte, Nebraska, restaurant when he was warned that two enemies of his were gunning for him. One of them started in the front door, the other the back.

There was a mirror hanging over the front door that reflected the rear of the restaurant. Hickok drew his two six-shooters and fired both of them at the same time. One of the pistols he had held on his shoulder and sighted through the mirror. Both men fell dead.

In 1871 a vaudeville troupe offered him a large salary to go on the stage and give shooting exhibitions. Bill would try anything once, and so he accepted the offer. But he balked when he found out that the management wanted him to perform his act with blank cartridges. He traveled several weeks with the show, but soon he got disgusted and quit.

He said: "What is the use of playing make-believe when I have been doing the real thing all my life."

He was peace officer in Hays City, Kansas, once, when a bad man named Strawhan came to settle an old account with him. Wild Bill entered a saloon and pretended not to notice the man following him. Strawhan, thinking that he was unobserved, slowly and carefully drew a bead, but quick as a flash Wild Bill turned and fired point-blank. Strawhan dropped to the floor, dead.

In 1872 Bill attended the Fair at Kansas City. The James boys rode up and tried to rob the gate receipts, but Wild Bill, a six-shooter in each hand, laid down such a barrage of lead that the gang gave up the idea.

Naturally, a man with such a striking physical appearance and glamorous reputation would have trouble growing out of his affairs with women. Once he stole Dave Tutt's girl right out from under his nose. When Wild Bill had tired of the girl, he discarded her and started making love to Dave's sister. This was too much for Tutt's pride, and he swore vengeance.

The shooting began in Main Street with the contestants seventy-five yards apart. Tutt was nervous and in a hurry. He started firing rapidly, and his bullets went wild. Hickok laid one of his revolvers across his left arm and continued to walk slowly toward his antagonist. Finally he pulled the trigger once, and Dave Tutt fell with a bullet through his heart.

**B**UT even the great man of the west lost once in both love and fighting. Wild Bill was in love with Jessie Hazel, but she turned him down for Phil Coe. Bill got drunk and started going from one saloon to the

other. At one he saw the two lovers seated at a table drinking wine. He lost his head and slapped the girl.

Phil Coe sprang from his chair like a madman. Catching Hickok under the chin with a powerful right, he knocked the big plainsman clear across the room. Hickok got up and charged back at Phil like an infuriated old buffalo bull.

This was a battle of the giants, for Phil Coe was well over six feet himself and weighed over two hundred pounds. Finally, Coe landed a tremendous wallop on Bill's jaw.

Hickok folded up and sank to the floor, unconscious. Furiously, Coe jumped on top of him and began to dig his boots into the prostrate man's chest and stomach, and then not satisfied with that, the enraged man climbed astride Hickok and began banging his head back and forth on the floor.

Jessie Hazel couldn't stand the gruesome affair any longer, now that the fight was obviously nothing but a slaughter. She got down on her knees beside Phil Coe and begged him to stop.

Next day Bill was all right, and the beating had sobered him up. He apologized to Phil and everything was apparently forgiven. But Wild Bill never forgot.

One day, shortly afterward, Bill got drunk again. He saw Coe walk by, and without giving him any warning whatsoever he turned and shot Coe in the back.

Phil Coe turned and said in his dying breath, "Bill, you are a dirty yellow coward. I hope they get you the same way." Then he was dead.

It was the only black mark that Hickok ever had placed against his record. When he got the booze out of his system, he regretted the affair terribly. The great man himself had broken the code of the West.

After this Wild Bill became careless. Never before had he sat in on a poker game unless his back was to the wall, but one night in Deadwood he allowed Jack McCall, an insignificant nobody, to stand behind him.

McCall, prodded on by drinks from Hickok's enemies, shot the great plainsman in the back.



Sam began a systematic search of the rough tumble of rocks, holding his rifle ready at all times.

## SCOURGE of the RANGE

*Fresh blood on his muzzle condemned young Tim's pet, Ruff, as a killer outcast, fit only to die. For how could Tim's daddy know, as he pulled his carbine's trigger, that his own life would be forfeit—for the death of a calf-killing dog?*

**By J. A. SMITH**

**I**T WAS quiet there in the tiny basin. Too quiet. The pale half moon sprayed a deceptive gloom over a blanket of billowy black brush. The mellow smell of wet sage hung heavily in a tired atmosphere. Even the thin air seemed to glide on cautious wings.

Then out of the eerie blending of moonlight and shadow, where the rocks rose stark against the skyline, came a strangled cry. Briefly again, an ominous silence pressed down heavily over Black Basin.

Low it came at first, and soft—barely distinguishable from the silky moan of a

mild gust of wind through the scattering mesquites. Rapidly then, swelling in volume it rose, ascending the scale in one full sweep of undulating sound. And the laughing owls, cackling hideously among sparse tree tops at that first strangled cry, heard the mighty victory wail and hushed their raucous din.

"Hear that, Simon?" Old Sam Dodson looked at his brown helper significantly. "*El Lobo, señor!*" There was tense excitement in the Mexican's voice. "He keel 'nother calf!"

Like a long, gaunt cat, Sam Dodson worked his way silently across the grassy knolls and gray rocks. Simon followed, bending low, padding softly through the scattered brush. The wind was in their favor. Sam gripped his battered carbine until the knuckles on his right hand showed white.

By crawling on their bellies, by making each move with studied cautiousness, the two reached the crest of a rocky knoll. Old Sam pushed a rough, drawn face through a slit in the red rocks. He swore in surprise. He got up and walked down into the shallow basin.

Cherry Wilson was standing there looking at the Dodson's dog, Ruff. He turned as Sam and the Mexican walked up. There was no hint of triumph in his voice as he spoke.

"Looks like we've found our lobo, Sam. There's blood on his muzzle, and here lays a calf with his throat slit."

"Ruff!" Sam's voice was hoarse.

"I had the wind in my favor," Cherry Wilson explained. "I got up close and I'd a-killed him in another second. But the moon's just strong enough to show a glint from the silver on that collar. There's been a right smart of talk about that dog, you know. Shore hate this—for your boy's sake."

"It's sort of hard for me to believe, Cherry," Old Sam looked at the dog, half German shepherd, half prairie wolf. "That boy of mine brought him up from a puppy and trained him mighty close. Durned dog's like a brother to the boy. I wouldn't a-thought he'd left the house at all, with Tim sick."

Sam hooked a finger in the dog's collar and ran a rough hand over his muzzle. It came away sticky

His voice was strained and halting when he spoke again. "Never thought I'd live to see this . . ."

Simon's face was the color of brown chocolate. It shone in the yellowish light. His voice was sad.

"Other day when I catch heem diggin' up calf leg, I theenk maybeso he jus' find it. But too many thing happen lately. 'Nother time I see thees Ruff dog messin' roun' fresh keel calf. He gone bad dog surest thing."

"I've seen him out several nights prowling the range, Sam," Cherry Wilson spoke up. "And one of my boys swore it was him that dodged a bullet on the far side of a fresh kill not a week ago. Feel sorry for that boy of your'n, but guess it can't be helped."

Old Sam Dodson's eyes were pits of misery in a huge frame that shook slightly with the realization of the task before him. There was only one way to deal with a calf-killing dog. One cropped up every so often in the cattle country. And sometimes one dog gone bad would cause others to do the same. Just two years ago old Cherry Wilson, who owned the neighboring Double Singletree Ranch, had killed his own dog, the best catch brindle cur that had ever dumped a fast running bull with a quick hold on the nose. The dog had let his savage catch-lust get the best of him and had started fighting cattle whether he was bid to do so or not. And there's only one cure for a kill-crazed dog. Cherry Wilson hadn't hesitated on that occasion.

Tonight was only one of many that Sam Dodson and Cherry had spent after this new threat to their cattle. They had tried traps, poison, every known method for putting a calf-killing lobo out of commission, but none had worked. So the two men had started meeting several nights a week and hunting the midnight trails.

The victory was a little different from what old Sam had looked forward to. It had drained the vitality from his wiry frame to find the dog his boy worshipped to be a marauder.

Before he had time to argue with himself, to grow weak in the face of his hardest task, Sam brought up his carbine and fired. The great wolf-dog jumped in surprised pain, hit the ground stiff-legged,

and rolled over. Cherry Wilson dragged the dog to the rim of Broken-Legged Canyon, a narrow, brush-choked waterway that threaded down through Black Basin like a hairy snake. He rolled the big dog over the side and into a growth of thick brush.

Sam and Simon turned, walked slowly into the night. Cherry walked back with them to where they had left their horses.

"Sorry it had to be that way, Sam," Cherry Wilson said. "Good night." He mounted the big roan and rode off, saddle leather squeaking. The horse snorted as he was spurred into a lope.

"I reckon, Simon," old Sam said half to himself, "we better go in. I got to tell the boy."



A GREAT emptiness spread over Sam's stomach as he lit the smoky oil lamp. The globe squeaked a little as he pressed it down in the guards. The flame spread over an uneven wick and pushed back the dark gloom in the tiny room. Tim lay there sleeping. It looked as if there was a faint smile on his face. Sam glanced back at the lamp. He'd wait till the rose-petal flame quit popping before he awoke the boy.

But it'd be a shame to rouse Tim now. He wouldn't get to sleep again all night. And Martha had always said a growing boy needed his sleep. He'd tell Tim in the morning. . . .

The springs in old Sam's bed creaked and popped and groaned until a streak of light flowed dully in the east. It was no use. He couldn't sleep. Sam got up and started breakfast.

When young Tim Dodson awoke, the old rancher walked over and sat down on the foot of his bed. If he had hoped that daylight would make telling the boy any easier, the hope died when he looked into Tim's eyes.

Old Sam came right to the point. "Found Ruff standing over a calf last night in Black Basin. Critter was still kicking. The dog had blood on his muzzle. Cherry Wilson caught him red-handed. I had to shoot him. Sorry, son."

The boy seemed unable to grasp the significance of what his father had just

said. At first Tim must have hoped the old man was joking. Then he saw the red-streaked, sleepless eyes, and his face drained of color.

When his voice would come the boy asked, "Were you dead certain, Pa?"

"Dead certain, son."

"Pa—" Young Tim Dodson looked out the window and across the brushy, rolling hills. "Pa, you've made a mighty big mistake!"

Tim had been propped up on his right elbow. He lay back then, lay down and closed his eyes. . . .

A week later Sam was walking parallel to a small canyon and had started across a mesquite flat when he veered sharply and climbed the slanting side of a huge boulder. He liked to sit on its rounded, cool surface and gaze out across the maze of canyons, draws, and hogback ridges that comprised his little kingdom. But there had been an empty ring to his accustomed pleasures for the past week.

Tim wasn't doing so well. It bothered old Sam. Tim was the only thing he had left now, since Martha's death. He'd not been at the ranch when Tim crawled on that bay hellion. The boy'd always wanted to ride that horse. And old Sam had said he'd use a doubled well rope on any kid of his who would crawl on that killer. Old Sam didn't have but the one kid, so Tim had reckoned it was him the old man spoke of. He'd stayed clear until that day nearly three months ago.

Sam had ridden up in time to see the boy sail off and lie quietly in the dust, a trickle of blood running out his mouth. Doc Bentsen had administered first aid, then had given Tim a long checking over. And when the old medico had straightened up and ran a faded handkerchief over his specks, he'd looked pretty solemn.

"Mussed up pretty bad inside, Sam," the doc had said. "There have been cases of cowboys having their livers plumb tore loose by a stiff-legged bronc. Don't let this boy ride again for three months. Keep him in bed at least six weeks. If he crawls on a horse before his three months are up, he may never ride again."

Tim had brooded a lot, just messing around the house. But Ruff had kept him company most of the time. And now, since he didn't have Ruff, the boy hadn't looked

so good. He'd stayed in bed more. He hadn't spoken directly to Sam since that day the dog had been shot. And Sam got to thinking that maybe he'd shot something more than just a dog, out there that night in Black Basin. Maybe his bullet also severed the bond between him and his son. It sort of looked that way.

Last time the doctor had checked on Tim he'd straightened up and looked at the boy. There'd been a puzzled look in his eyes and he'd shaken his head a little.

Sam got up off the boulder. He wished to hell there was more work to do. This was the slack season. It wasn't good for a man to just sit and think too much.

The sun, no more than an hour high, threw a red sheen over the rolling blanket of huisache brush as the old rancher paused for one last survey of the rough country below.

Sam saw it then. A huge wolf trotted out of a cutbank draw and stood for a brief instant. The old rancher sucked in his breath involuntarily. His eyebrows bunched in surprise. He jerked the old carbine up and fired just as the big wolf broke into a run. The lead missed the animal. Bullets bit puffs of gray sandstone from the rock walls of a narrow canyon and whined off angrily as old Sam worked the lever of his rifle in feverish haste. The big wolf rolled forward. One of those hasty shots had made contact. But the huge animal got shakily to his feet and swept on up the canyon.

The old rancher descended recklessly and ran forward with abandon. And even as he leaped rock-studded arroyos and dodged prickly thorns of the catclaw brush, old Sam mumbled, "He's heading for the bluffs! Got to get that wolf. Might cost me a thousand dollars in cattle."



SAM was breathing heavily when he reached the Bluffs, an upjutting of hard soil, stacked high with rugged rocks. It was a landmark on the small ranch. He glanced apprehensively to the north, out across vast stretches of flat plains that lay serene and smooth as the surface of skimmed milk. The huge wolf had not gone on. It was somewhere here in the Bluffs.

Sam began a systematic search of the rough tumble of rocks, holding his rifle ready at all times. The big wolf was hid in here somewhere. He wasn't bleeding much. Sam had found only two signs of blood on his way up the narrow canyon. If he didn't run that wolf out before dark, the wolf would go free. His wound would heal—and then he'd be back, to prey on the herd.

Even Sam's sharp old eyes, trained to pick out every detail during a long life spent outdoors, almost passed up the tiny opening that was the cave's mouth. It was half hidden by the vast reaches of a huge cactus plant, and ran deep into a miniature mountain of boulders. Sam had never seen the small cave before, though he thought that he had combed every square yard of his small domain time and again.

With a spring in his step, old Sam knelt swiftly and examined the entrance. A long, grayish-black hair clung to a rough blister of rock. The entrance looked used. Ten to one, the wolf was inside.

Beating back tough cactus arms with the butt of his rifle, Sam was able to squeeze through the narrow entrance. The cave was black inside. An empty feeling in the pit of his stomach caused Sam to hesitate momentarily, rifle ready, nerves taut. It was just something about going into a dark cave that way, not knowing one second what to expect the next. . . .

Sam shook his head, a little angry at himself for his doubts, and pressed on into the cave. A man who'd seen hell boil over and had felt it run down his own collar couldn't afford to feel any qualms about merely exploring a dark cave. He didn't even know for sure that the lobo was in here.

A cold, dank draft of air like an icy hand brushed across his face. The cave widened and grew in height, so that old Sam could stand in a crouched position. The cavern thrust back into the bowels of the tiny boulder-strewn hump like a tube in a coal mine. There was a damp, musty smell, the odor of decayed bones. He decided to strike a match and have a look about.

The frail flame threw out a dull oval of light and disclosed a rock floor strewn with bones. A few jackrabbit remains,



an armadillo shell, but mostly—calf bones!

The dying flame bit at old Sam's forefinger and thumb. He scratched another hurriedly. The light had a comforting, reassuring effect.

It was when darkness started closing in around the dull sheen cast by this second match that Sam heard a low growl rumble out of the blackness ahead of him. His first impulse was to fire at the sound. But he couldn't afford to miss now.

With hands that shook unnaturally, the old rancher brought out another match and struck it on the sole of his boot. He advanced cautiously. The cave widened into a tiny, hollowed room. Tiny rivulets of water strung down from the ceiling, gleaming in the feeble light like long strings of jewels. The floor was littered with bones. Hard pressed perhaps on some of his kills, the wolf had brought his kills to the safety of his den and there dined in peace. The old rancher continued to advance slowly.

Then he saw it. The beast was standing there, back to the cave's very end. Bleeding a little, stained hair bristled, and a deathly light in his eyes, the lobo stood with head lowered, ears back flat, ready to leap. The dim flicker of the match lent a ghostly, unreal appearance to the picture. Sam stared at the beast in a sort of weird fascination.

He knew that he had to act, and act quickly, yet with no swift, reckless movement that would cause the animal to leap for his throat. When the light died out this time, the lobo would leap.

Feverishly Sam brought up his carbine and fired. But the lobo was swifter. The flash from his rifle showed Sam that he had missed—that even as he had dropped the match and fired, the big wolf was in the air. His left arm rose involuntarily. There was a distinct snap as the bone gave way under powerful pressure.

The impact of the heavy animal had carried Sam off his feet, his rifle clanging to the rock floor. In blind desperation, he rolled quickly and groped for the fallen weapon. Instead of the smooth, reassuring stock, his right hand closed over the wide, flat surface of a calf's shoulder bone. It was too clumsy and not heavy enough to be useful as a weapon, but perhaps it could be used to shield his throat.

SAM knew he was fighting for his life. His left hand and arm were useless. The carbine, a weapon of questionable value at such close quarters, was momentarily lost to him. It all depended on his keeping the big flat bone over his throat as he backed out to the light.

Again the wolf lunged, and a sharp crack of savage teeth on the bone's hard surface made Sam realize just how long a man's neck would last under such pressure. This time the wolf had made a side rush as Sam was trying to regain his feet. The impact had carried him hard against the rock wall, all but knocking the breath from his lungs—but he was on his feet again!

Breathing hard but holding his own, Sam backed toward the cave's entrance, hope lending strength to his aching muscles.

Walking cautiously backward, one arm hanging useless and the other pressing the flat bone over his face and throat, the old rancher was wholly unprepared for the turn of balance his heel effected through coming in contact with a slab of out-jutting rock. Sam went over heavily on his back. One swift lunge and the maddened beast was over him, ready for a quick finish.

Struggling, writhing, panting, the old rancher realized more than ever just what that old bone was worth to him, as the wolf tried to tear it away so that he might get a throat hold. Sam felt a little faint. His right arm, slashed mercilessly by the animal's snapping fangs, was beginning to grow weak. It wouldn't be long now. A man with one arm gone just couldn't. . . .

And then Sam was sure the end would be only a matter of seconds. Although he had reached a point in the cave where the light showed dimly, and although his eyes were getting more accustomed to the darkness and he could actually see a little, old Sam's brain evidently had already begun to grow foggy. It was pure irony, now that Sam needed Ruff more than he had ever needed a dog, that he should think he heard Ruff's reassuring bark. Things like that happened to people, all right. It was his conscience giving the old man one last dubbing before he went out. He'd read about things like that.

Old Ruff would have come, too, old Sam knew, had he only been alive. The

sound of a rifle anywhere on the small ranch had always brought the dog, ready to track down wounded game or to congratulate Sam on a dead shot by a warm tongue on the rough old hands. The rancher thought of Tim and he hoped the boy would forgive.

Sam's arm was growing numb now; the bone was being pulled away from his grasp. He was almost glad. He wanted to rest. He was tired, so very tired. . . .

With an uneasy whine a dog paused briefly in the cave's entrance. The wolf whirled with a snarl, the flat bone clutched between his bared fangs. With one swift glance the dog took in the scene before him. He charged furiously, a growl of hatred ringing out a grim challenge as he came. The wolf met him half way.

Panting weakly, old Sam raised himself on his right elbow. That brief silhouette at the cave's entrance had brought a queer pang to the old man's heart. It was like a sledge hammer blow on the head, but a hammer padded with silk. Sam brushed an imaginary mist from his eyes. He was going crazy, was already

loco—or else that biting, snapping, growling bundle of hell and dynamite, giving the great wolf a fight for his life there on the cave floor, was . . . It couldn't be—but it *had* to be!

"Ruff, boy!" Sam cried out, his voice breaking. "Ruff, dog—I—I—"

Grim death would call the roll at the finish of that fight.

The kill-lust in the wolf-dog's heart had turned him into a frenzied, slashing demon, and nothing short of death for his adversary would stop those eager jaws. And although the wolf had lost some blood from its wound, its brute strength and superior cunning were still a match for the wolf-dog. They rolled and lunged to the cave's entrance.

Sam lay on the damp rock floor, too exhausted and weak from the loss of blood to rise, and listened to the raging combat. After the first surging thrill, the profound shock of realization that Ruff was still alive had passed, the old rancher felt new concern. Not only his life but the life of the dog now depended on that fight. Even now, the Grim Reaper must be smiling.

### AT WAR WITH ALL MEN!

That was the creed of the nameless frontier waif who swore that the world owed him a living, and he'd get his the easy way—at the point of a gun, killing where ever he could!

Once he introduced himself to a pair of tough looking hombres as Kid Curry's younger brother—and found, too late, that he was talking to that famous member of the Wild Bunch, himself! And from then on, the Killer swore, he had still more reason to hate the world.

Here is a starkly realistic novel of the Old West; the dramatic—even the terrifying—history of a man who was born brone. You won't want to miss this powerful story—

#### "Killer Without a Name"

One of Walt Coburn's most gripping and authentic sagas of the cow-country he knows so well!



**10¢ TIME** ALL STORIES COMPLETE  
**WESTERN**  
**MAGAZINE**

The April issue is now on the newsstands  
Buy it today!

Also, "Gun Gambler of the Big Muddy," a novel of river gamblers, by Tom Roan, plus other stories by Tom W. Blackburn, Harry F. Oltsted, and other famous Western authors!

Whether it be one death or two depended on an animal Sam now felt sure was innocent—the wolf-dog he had tried to shoot for a calf killer.

Then the thing happened that the old rancher had fought against all along. Darkness crept in. The world suddenly fell quiet.



OLD SAM DODSON opened his eyes to find Tim bathing his face with a damp handkerchief. That seemed mighty strange. There were a number of things he couldn't account for. He started to get up.

Tim was talking. "Take it easy, old-timer!" The boy smiled warmly.

It was the first time Tim had smiled at him in a long time. It made the old man feel funny inside.

"Blamed lobo mussed you up a little. Maybe some of these days you'll learn which to trust, a good dog or a bad lobo!" There was jesting reproof in the boy's voice.

"How'd you get here, son? How in hell—"

"I rode, pa. Took it easy. Won't hurt me none. Been ridin' a little every day when you were gone. Heck fire, pa—it's been over two months and a half!"

Old Sam's head was still swimming. He was all mixed up. "But Ruff, son, the dog—"

"You shot him in the right side of his chest, pa," the boy's voice was hurt now, tender. "It was mostly a flesh wound. He drug up to my window and whined next morning while you were out on the range. I carried him out to the wood shed, worked on him most all that morning. I kept him hid there till he got better. Then I'd make him stay hid out all day and he'd come in and sleep in my room at night. Pa, I've knowed all along that Ruff didn't kill no calves. I've taught him better. That dog has had the right kind of bringing up. He's my dog."

"Today Cherry Wilson was over, saying he'd lost two calves this week, killed the same way they'd always been killed. Said you an' him might have made a mistake."

Sam was rallying now. "I lost one the first part o' this week myself," he admitted. "Didn't have stomach enough to tell you!"

"After I heard what Cherry Wilson said," the boy went on, "I got old Ruff and we started out to tell you. You see, pa, I've had that dog with me every minute of the night while them kills have been made this week. We heard you shooting, found where you'd been, and Ruff bounded on ahead when he smelled the lobo's blood. You see, pa—" the boy ran a small hand through the long gray-black hair on the dog's neck—"a man just don't understand things that a boy does about a dog. Sure there was blood on Ruff's muzzle—he'd been fighting the lobo. I've taught the dog to protect our cattle. I knew he wouldn't turn around behind my back and kill one!"

Sam Dodson smiled. He pulled himself up on his good elbow and looked at the dog. An ugly wound, not yet completely healed, told the story of a bullet placed too hastily. Two inches to the left, and it would have been a different story. Two inches, and Ruff wouldn't have been there at the cave—and he himself. . . .

"Son—" Sam's voice was low, halting—"even an old hard-head like me knows when he's whupped. A man as old as I am can learn something about his own son—even about his son's dog. I owe Ruff a mighty big apology. Hold me up so I can ruffle the old devil's head hair with my good hand, son."

The dog's eyes were queerly full of trust as he lowered his head under Sam's rough hand. It was something Sam both couldn't—and at the same time could—understand, particularly after what the boy had said. It was what the boy felt for the dog.

Sam talked to the dog as he would have talked to a man who had received an injustice at his hands. Then he turned back to Tim.

"Forty times out of forty-one I'd a-been right about that dog, with the evidence we had ag'in him." Old Sam looked into the eyes of his son. There was a twinkle in the gray orbs and a hint of mist. "But I reckon you're right about this, son. In the case of a boy's dog, I guess it is different."



## "I'm worried about Ma..."

This boy is a casualty.

A few days ago, he was a hardened fighting man—with a glint in his eye and a set to his mouth that boded ill for his Axis foes.

Tonight he's just a bewildered lad. Bad news from home has hit him—and put him out of action—as effectively as an enemy bullet. Desperately he has tried to solve a problem back home; his mother ill, lonely, helpless—and apparently nothing he can do about it.

Tortured by doubt and uncertainty, he's come to the Red Cross Field Director for help. He'll get it.

It is the job of Red Cross Field Men

to unravel human snarls. Across their desks, sometimes no better than battered crates, more than 1,500,000 men in the past year have poured their troubles—have asked for and received counsel and assistance. Daily and nightly, with our armed forces from Africa to India, from Iceland to New Guinea, they are keeping up the morale our fighting men *must* have.

Not only to the fighting men but to War's victims wherever they can be reached the Red Cross is carrying relief supplies, clothing, medicines. The cost is tremendous and ever-increasing.

The Second War Fund is greater than the First, but no greater than the increased needs.

Give more this year—give double if you can.

Your Dollars help  make possible the  
**AMERICAN RED CROSS**

*This space contributed by the Publisher*

# BATTALION OF DEATH

By WILLIAM R. COX



☆ Iron Horse trail-blazers of American empire roared on to ☆  
their destiny of a united continent, but at Los Pesos town ☆  
☆ was a bottleneck, where an undercover army of renegade ☆  
pioneer killers lived only for the almighty dollar—and to ☆  
☆ hell with the men who fought and died to build a nation! ☆

*A stirring novelette of America's Western Empire-builders*



The big man was standing upright, knees bent, gun flaming.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Boothill Salutes the Brave

**L**OS PESOS lay near the sluggish waters of the Rio Grande and panted with excitement. Four railroads worked their slow way toward the

sleepy town, and the vultures were already settled and waiting. George Dawes, bearded, tall, strong as an oak, stood in the office of Mayor Ace Ledbetter and sounded off.

"There she is!" he growled. "A good town—once! Now there's nothing but hellions and their women. Linda can't

walk the streets without bein' insulted. I'm warnin' you, Ace! Clean 'er up, or me and my boys'll come ridin' in some night."

Thin, hard-bitten Ace Ledbetter said, "You can't do it, George. We got a marshal. Camp Morton's one of the greatest gun-throwin' officers the west ever saw. When the railroads get here, he'll clean house quick."

Below them, in the street, were sudden sounds. Two men came striding from the Joy Palace. One was a giant with florid features and scars about the eyes. He wore a plaid shirt of flashy pattern, tight-fitting trousers and beaded boots. He shoved the other, smaller man along ahead of him. He paused, and as the other man staggered, the giant's hand made a swift gesture. His sixgun came into his hand and exploded. The other hombre, reaching for his weapon too late, screamed, grabbed his belly, fell face forward and kicked his life out in Main Street's dirt.

From the barber shop across the way another big man strolled. He stepped over the dead man and held out his hand. The killer hesitated, then meekly surrendered his weapon. The two walked off together, chatting like old friends.

"You see?" Ledbetter said. "Mingo Bill is under arrest! Camp just took his gun and walked him off to jail. That's law, George!"

George Dawes shook his head slowly. "Ace," he said, "you and me ranched together afore you came to town and let others run your beeves. I useta think a lot of you, Ace. But when you call that exhibition an instance of law-abidance—the town's corrupted you!"

The mayor's face went flinty. "You go back to Cross Sticks and run yore ranch, George," he said. "I'm runnin' this town. Camp Morton is our marshal, and I'm stickin' by him."

Dawes said thinly, "Morton was a great man once, but now he's a drunken sot and a consorter with such as Mingo Bill. I'm goin', Ace, but I'll be back."

He turned his back upon his old-time friend and clomped heavily down the steps. He watched a moment while idlers picked up the dead man and carried him to the Ideal Undertaking Parlor, Sim Comisky, Prop. There was plenty of business for

Sim these days. Los Pesos was having a boom.

Suddenly four men were drifting into the street. All wore fancy shirts, trademark of Mingo Bill's band. There was Sad Sam Jakes, wanted in Missouri for murder. There was Dirty Dick McCue, who never gave a sucker an even break on the draw. One-finger Ike was suspected of having fallen to the depth of sheep-stealing in Montana. Last was Lone Luke, parchment-faced lunger, Mingo Bill's right-hand killer. Dawes knew them all.

The four followed Camp Morton and Dawes strolled along to have a look. The marshal's office was at the western end of Main Street. The jail was built into a sturdy adobe building, the office in front. Through the open doors and windows, a view of the interior was plain to passersby.

George Dawes came up close as Lone Luke entered behind the others. Hilarious greetings ensued. "That's the end of Sky-hooter Cal!" Mingo Bill boomed. "He's rustled his last Texas cattle. Never touch Texas cattle myself! I'm on yore side, Camp! I respect Texas law."

There was, Dawes admitted, some truth in this distorted statement. Mingo stole his cattle in Arizona or New Mexico, drove them over the line and sold them to unscrupulous buyers in Los Pesos—or over the Rio. Thus he was able to roam the streets of Texas towns unmolested. Thus he was able to dispense his own justice with his own quick guns.

Camp Morton said, "What you think of this new President Garfield, Mingo?"

George Dawes stopped, staring. They all sat about, comfortable, their heels elevated, as though at a social gathering. Camp Morton, at his desk, beamed upon them as happily as a bug in a rug. Camp's red-veined face showed the effects of dissipation. The one-time hero of many a lawless camp had once been a handsome man, admired by everyone who lived west of the Mississippi. Now he sat with outlaws, discussing politics.

Mingo Bill pursed his thick lips. "He's a damn Republican!" he growled. "No Republican's good for us Texicans!"

The others nodded gravely. Mingo Bill gave off the aura of a man who has made a shrewd point.



"We-ell, I hear good about the man," Camp Morton said. "A quiet type. Mebbe he won't interfere—"

A young man in black shoved George Dawes unceremoniously aside. He was lean, with a wide-brimmed, high-crowned Stetson and a single six-shooter tied low on his right flank. He wore tight breeks which clung to large, muscular calves. He did not walk like a cowboy, although he wore boots and spurs. He strode purposefully through the door of the marshal's office, swept his hat far back upon his head and stood there spraddle-legged, his chin out.



HE WAS, George Dawes noted, an ugly young man. He had a large nose, and his eyes quirked upward, giving him an Oriental touch. His skin was smooth and tinged with olive. His voice was harsh.

"Morton, are you locking this here man up?"

For a moment the question was like a rock dropped in a deep pool, followed only by ripples spreading outward. George Dawes took a step forward, his right hand creeping downward to his ancient Peacemaker. The ripples became owlhoot anger waves.

Camp Morton recovered quickly. "Who the hell do you think you are?" he roared.

"Jim Falcon," the young man said crisply. "I saw this big hound murder a man. Are you locking him up?"

Out of the corner of his eye, George Dawes saw someone running toward him. He took a quick look, at the same time straining his ears to hear what went on inside and weighing the odds against the newcomer. Dawes's daughter was approaching, her face white and eager.

"Dad, I saw it all!" she called. "That man—that Falcon—I told him about Mingo Bill! It's my fault. I was—indignant. Don't let him get hurt, Dad!"

Dawes put out a hand for silence. She came on, stopping only when she could see what was happening inside the building. Well, she was here, now, Dawes thought. She had been raised to the land. At twenty, she was already witness to violent death.

Dawes had thought to spare her much of it. He had sent her to school, and she had come back, lovely, fresh, unspoiled. The railroads should have tamed the southwest, at least in the towns, so that she could live a woman's life, have friends, have fun. But. . .

George Dawes had been in Texas since 1838. He was forty-five now and tough as nails. He was rich enough—if cattle prices held. The Cross Sticks was a fine ranch, but it was no damn good if his motherless daughter could not enjoy her life.

Inside there, Camp Morton and the outlaws were making common cause. Only the fact that they had a certain front to maintain in Los Pesos had saved Falcon's life thus far. In a moment Camp would make an issue of it—then only Dawes would know how the man called Falcon died.

"You can do it, Dad!" Linda said sharply.

Maybe that was all he needed. Maybe that was the only thing in the world George Dawes cared about, since his wife had been laid away under the elders. He drove forward, and the years fell from him, and he was crouching on the threshold of Morton's office, his gun covering the outlaw crew. His voice was low.

"Stand back, all!" he grated. "Answer the boy, Camp!"

Mingo Bill hesitated a split second. The others wouldn't move without orders. The outlaw chief looked to Morton to start something.

Jim Falcon said, without looking around, "You'll put him in the cooler or I'll make him answer! I'm staying in this town. I intend to have it clean—damn clean!"

Morton said, "Why you young, buttinsky, son of—"

Dawes never thought about Lone Luke's hide-out gun—and he should have. Luke was always apart from the others, always thinking far ahead. Now, near the door, he made a smooth left arm motion. The gun slid out and Luke fired. Dawes' weapon flew from his hand. The first barrel of the derringer threw a ball into George's wrist. The second cut into his body, on the left side.

Mingo Bill started to draw, but Falcon

was too quick; he went into action like a whirlwind. His fist banged against Mingo's head, sending him flying. Then Falcon's gun was out and he was firing.

Dirty Dick McCue staggered, but made the window and dove through. On the floor, Dawes reached weakly for his gun. Linda, running in, passed in front of him. Camp Morton sat numbly on his chair. The marshal never did go for a weapon.

The bullet in his body hampered him, but Dawes could handle the gun in his left hand. He managed to grab it and lift it with agonizing slowness, just as Mingo Bill slid through the back, toward the jail.

Then Linda was suddenly in Dawes's line of fire, bending over him. "Get down!" he shouted. "Out of range! I'll get one of 'em!"

But Linda, panicked, didn't obey. Luke got to his horse. A window smashed and Mingo Bill was gone. Jim Falcon was between One-finger Ike and Sad Sam. They clouted him with their gun-muzzles, then ran like hell out of the place. Falcon, blinded by the blows, staggered, blood streaming from cuts about his head.

George Dawes relaxed. It was tough to get it, and not down any of the men who caused his passing. A film came over his eyes, and when he opened them again Camp Morton still sat in the chair.

"This . . . finishes you, Camp," George Dawes gasped.

Morton did not seem to hear. He was dazed. Linda said, "Doc Lewes is coming, Dad."

"You could have prevented all this," George said. "If you had answered the boy right, you'd have stopped it all."

Camp's eyelids flickered. "I'm sorry, George," he said.

George said, "You're through . . . and that's good. . . ."

The doc was hurrying as fast as his fat legs would carry him. Tears streamed down Linda's cheeks. Falcon, wiping the blood from his face, was leaning against the wall, his ugly face grim.

"I'm sorry you chipped in, sir," he said. "I was willin' to try it alone. Then it got complicated. I'm dreadful sorry."

"Los Pesos . . . a good town . . . fine people . . ." muttered George. "Linda deserves . . . the best. . . ."

Morton said hoarsely, "George, say you ain't holdin' it against me! You're too good a man to go this way. I never meant for this to happen."

Morton had aged ten years in five minutes. His face was mottled and only in the dark eyes was there anything of the man he once had been.

Doc Lewes grunted, got down on his knees beside George and began cutting at the flannel shirt. Ace Ledbetter hurried in, coattails flapping. George grinned up at the mayor.

"No hard feelin's, Ace?" he said.

The mayor cursed. He turned and stared at Morton. The tall man arose, unpinned a small star from his shirt. "I resign, Mayor," Morton said. He wavered a little going out the door.

"Ace," George Dawes whispered, "give it to that boy . . . over there. He . . . spoke for . . . a clean town. Give the badge—to him!"

George smiled once at Linda. He said clearly, "All right, Mary! They'll carry along, Mother!"

Then George Dawes died, upon the floor of the office of the City Marshal of Los Pesos, the cattle town he had helped to build.

## CHAPTER TWO

### New Boss for Los Pesos

LINDA DAWES sat in the parlor of the Criley House and did not weep. Jim Falcon twisted his big hat in his hands and said miserably, "My fault, ma'am. If I hadn't got riled and stuck my big nose in there. . . ."

"I sent you," the girl said wearily. "Father's whole life was in Los Pesos. It was a symbol to him; it had to be made fit for women and kids to live in, or Dad could not rest. He began neglecting the ranch, trying to make Ledbetter and the others see it his way. The railroad's coming made such a difference—for the worst. Dad had hoped for much from the railroads."

"I only took that badge on account of what your dad said, ma'am," Jim Falcon said. "I'm going out and start this job right now. Are you going back to the ranch tonight?"

"No," Linda said. "I'll stay here for the funeral."

Falcon said, "Mingo and his men are gone, for now. But there's tin horns and some others. . . . I hope to see you again, ma'am."

She looked up at him. "I'll see you again, Jim Falcon. We can't lose, can we? We can be killed, but we can't let the West go on being bad. . . ."

He went out with that remark ringing in his ears. Jim Falcon was a sand-lapper from East Texas. He was a young man of some education in elementary schools, a young man who thought about things. His muscles were toughened on the ranches of the Southwest, but he was no cowboy. He was a young man of tenacious beliefs and sudden temper, destined, it had been said, to an early and violent death.

Ace Ledbetter had said to Falcon, "George was my best friend. We didn't agree about some things, and he got killed. Now you got the job he wanted done. Baldy Odell has the keys to the jail and won't give up as deputy easy, but you'd better get rid of Baldy. I'll leave it up to you, Falcon."

On one side in Los Pesos were a few merchants and the banker, Dermott, and the plain people. On the other side were saloon-keepers, gamblers and con men. Soon the railroad crews would bring their money in and these blood-suckers would fatten. Meantime, they fought among themselves and made a hell of Los Pesos. It was in full, raucous swing when Falcon walked down the street.

Baldy Odell was waiting in the marshal's office. He was sour and hard as nails. There was a crowd of hangers-on outside. Jim pushed through them, stood in the doorway where George Dawes had died. His temper was rising.

"You're fired, Odell!" he said. "Hand over the keys!"

Odell said harshly, "Now wait a minute, my young buckaroo! You gotta have a deputy—"

Jim grabbed Odell, swung him in one powerful motion and turned him upside down. Baldy's gun clattered on the floor. His limbs writhed. In the grasp of the new marshal he was helpless as a shorn lamb.

Jim shook Odell until the man's teeth

rattled. Objects tumbled on the hard floor alongside the fallen sixgun. Keys clanked at last. Jim took a single step and heaved. Odell's body arched out the door and into the crowd of open-mouthed loafers, scattering them like chaff in the wind. Jim's gun put a period to the episode, clearing the streets as he emptied it at the sky.

"I'm turnin' loose my wolf!" he shouted. "And I'm comin' fast with these keys! I'll lock up this whole damn town if I have to!"

He watched them go. Drunken idlers ran easy, he reflected. And they would carry news, too. Los Pesos would be ready for him tonight. He picked up Baldy's belongings, filed them away in a drawer. And then he found the disc.

It was a metal disc which had been cut in half. He had never seen anything quite like it. It was lead, he guessed. Faint scratchings on it were indistinguishable. Some fragment of a story he had heard long ago buzzed in his mind—something about guerillas in the Civil War who had carried such pocket pieces as identification.

But it was fifteen years since the war. He tossed the piece in with the other stuff and emptied Baldy's gun. He reloaded his own weapon and hung it carefully in its holster. He examined the premises, noted with approval the stout jail bars.

He went outside, onto Main Street. The shades of the few permanent homes were drawn, but the bordellos and saloons were just awaking to another round of pleasure and profit. Cowboys rattled in and swaggered to their favorite spots for refreshment. There would be high jinks in Los Pesos . . . later.



JIM FALCON strolled past Sim Comisky's undertaking parlor. Two dead men lay therein, one good, one bad. He paused a moment, making a mental obeisance to George Dawes, swearing again that the cattleman had not died in vain. He went down to the telegraph office and sent a message to the east. It read, "Have taken marshal's star and will proceed with business as scheduled."

He started on the side streets, among the painted women. He was politic here,

explaining his new order of things. He met with some derision, but behind the acid words was respect for the new marshal's intent gaze and earnestness. He worked his way back to Main Street, to the Joy Palace, biggest and noisiest of all town dens.

Ace Ledbetter and several prosperous townsmen were at the bar, drinking their nightcaps. Jim moved past with a nod, proceeding to the faro tables. He watched the dealers carefully for a while. Then he strolled over to the roulette wheel. He shook his head at the contraption and walked back to where Camp Morton was drinking alone.

"I hear you own this place, Morton," Jim said crisply.

Jim's words were heard by everyone and the noise abated a little.

Morton looked up and said thickly, "Any objections?"

"I'm closing your wheel and your faro tables," Jim said. "The wheel is crooked and your dealers stink!"

Camp Morton drained his whiskey. He said indifferently, in a liquor-ridden voice, "All right. I'm gettin' out tomorrow. Close up the damn place—if Ledbetter don't want to keep it open."

Jim looked curiously at the man. He said, "I guess you're through, eh, Morton? For good!"

The eyes which stared back at him were haunted, impersonal. "Yeah. I'm through. Now, go to hell, will you, before I kill you where you stand?"

"Why in the good hell don't you try?" Falcon rasped.

"I can do it," Morton said. "I saw you draw this afternoon. You won't last past the first good man who slings on you. I hate a damn hymn-shouter and always did! Go away and leave me alone!"

Jim hesitated. Then something made him turn and go slowly away from this wreck of a good man. He came down to where Ledbetter stared at him. The others stepped back. Jim said, "So you own part of this with Morton? You heard what I said about the tables and the wheel, Mayor. Do you want me to turn in this badge?"

"No," Ledbetter said, after a moment.

Jim nodded pleasantly. He went through the doors into the street, making for the

next saloon. Silence reigned in the Joy Palace as men stared curiously at Ace Ledbetter. Camp Morton finished another drink, then went slowly out of the place where he had ruled supreme and made his way to his solitary room in the Criley House.

Jim Falcon worked the length of Main Street. In his wake went grumbles of discontent, but also a definite suspension of certain evils. His lean, ugly earnestness, his erect carriage, his fierceness made an impression even upon the boomtown.

As he sauntered back past the hotel he saw Morton saddling a big white horse in the corral. He watched for a moment, until the man had swung heavily, wearily into the saddle, and then noted that Morton rode west out of town.

"The end of an era," Jim muttered. "He was a good man in his day, but his day is passing. There was—there was something magnificent about him, at that. . . ."

From the hotel veranda Linda's soft voice came. "Talking to yourself?"

Jim went nearer the girl. "Morton's leaving town," he said. "Was he Ledbetter's partner in anything beside the Joy Palace?"

"I didn't know they were partners in any way," Linda said. "Ace always backed Morton, but—"

"Ledbetter's a rich man," Jim said. "He owns the Ace-Deuce Ranch and several properties here in Los Pesos. He's interested in the bank. He's politically ambitious."

"You know a lot about Los Pesos!" the girl said.

"Yes," Jim Falcon said. "I know a lot about it."

"You're here for something?"

"Yes," Jim said.

"Ace is almost like an uncle to me," she said. "He and Dad were friends; Ace is not bad. He's an old-timer. . . ."

"Camp Morton is not all bad, either. There are few real scoundrels in this country. Only Mingo Bill, and even he brags about not stealin' Texas cattle!"

The girl arose and went toward the door of the hotel. "I know you'll do what you think is right, Jim Falcon," she said softly. "Good-night!"

He went on, a sort of glow within him

because of her confidence. He came down to the lights of the Joy Palace, and the lack of noise was the tip-off. He stepped into a half-shadow and waited. Baldy Odell, carrying a double-barreled shotgun, stepped out of the glare of the Palace, squinting.

"Bad tactics, Baldy," Jim said. He held a Colt ready in his hand and waited for Baldy to wheel toward his voice. Then he aimed carefully at Odell's belt and squeezed steadily on the trigger.

It was not fancy shooting—but the shotgun flew into the air. Baldy's hands sought his middle; he staggered several paces, then fell; doubled over, blood oozing between his fingers. It was not pretty, and Falcon's face brooded darkly as men came running, exclaiming that the new marshal had gone up against a scattergun with his six, and had come out on top.

sessions and took them down to the bank for deposit in the safe. On instinct, he removed the leaden half-medallion, an obviously worthless piece, and put it in his pocket.

Ace Ledbetter himself placed the packet in the vault, a huge iron safe built into the wall. He turned, and his lean face was coldly serious. "You made a big start, Falcon," he said slowly. "You killed half my business in the Palace. Of course, they're cheatin' each other right on, at the poker tables, and you ain't gained much. Those tin horns don't want an honest game. Don't you understand that?"

Jim said flatly, "Did you ever warn your friends in town to lay off your tables or your wheel?"

Ledbetter looked nervous despite his aggressiveness. "I told you to clean the town," he said. "George was my best

---

**IF YOU have not as yet made the acquaintance of Duke Bagley, one of the most colorfully human and likable characters in Western fiction, we suggest that you get a copy of STAR WESTERN today, turn to William R. Cox's novel, "Duke Bagley's Hangnouse Rendezvous" and get set for some big caliber reading pleasure!**

---

There would be little trouble in Los Pesos now. Until someone bushwhacked Falcon, or some glory-seeking, reckless young speed artist drew and fired with greater swiftness and coordination, the new marshal would rule. But there was little satisfaction in it. Falcon had not come to Los Pesos to begin a reign of terror.

He walked the beat, up and down Main Street, and there was order. But it was a one-man rule. Underneath, the tin horns and badmen were surly and resentful. It was like walking a tight rope over a smoldering volcano, and no one knew it better than Falcon.

♦ ♦ ♦

THEY buried George Dawes and Linda left for the Cross Sticks ranch. They buried Skyhooter Cal and Baldy Odell without ceremony, up on Boothill. Jim Falcon went to his office and made a package of Baldy's pos-

sessions. I'm stickin' to what I said. But you're goin' too far—and Mingo Bill will be back. This is his bailiwick."

"Are you warnin' me?" Jim asked quietly.

"In a way," Ace snapped. "I want you to come out right, Falcon. Mingo Bill's got friends here; he sells his cattle in Los Pesos."

"Stolen cattle," Falcon said slowly. "And so-called respectable people tolerate him."

"When the railroads come, it'll be different," said Ledbetter.

"It'll be different before they come," the marshal said.

Falcon ate his noonday meal in the Criley House and rested for a moment, debating his course of procedure. His thoughts kept running off after Linda Dawes, remembering her deep blue eyes, her courage in the face of the loss of her beloved father.

But his thoughts always came back to Los Pesos. The adobe buildings stretched

under the sun, solid and reassuring. The Spaniards had built the town, the Texans had wrested it from Mexico by force of arms. It was no fly-by-night village now. It was to be a terminus for the shining rails which crept ever westward, linking the continent together.

George Dawes had been right. The West deserved the best. It had been hard, exciting living, and the spirit of adventure would always live beneath the Lone Star. But there must be places where a woman could have a life, where a man could raise a family in security.

Jim Falcon knew that he could not achieve this single-handed. He had no illusions about crusading among the tough Border Texans. But for a little while, he thought, a man with plans and the proper preparations in his mind might make his imprint upon the city . . . and thus upon the Border.

He arose from the porch as a dusty excited man rode into town. His horse bore the Cross Sticks brand and Jim moved forward, excitement rising within him. The cowboy swung down, his face red, words spilling from him.

"Miss Linda sent me! . . . They got her cattle and drove off southwest, for the River. Pretty near cleaned her out! Mingo Bill and his gang, I reckon . . . There was five of them, we made out by the tracks. The Sheriff's gone east, and we got to have a posse, Marshal! Miss Linda says can you help her?"

Jim said, "Come with me." He led the jittery puncher down to the Palace. Ace Ledbetter came forward. "What's the trouble, Calamity?" Ledbetter said.

The cowboy poured out his woes. Jim listened, watching Ace. Watching the others who crowded around. Now Mingo Bill had struck at Texan property. These friends of his—who had protected him as a defender of the state—could now see him as a real outlaw. What would they do?

"We've got to go after him!" Ace said. "We can't let Linda's cattle be run off!"

Others joined in, merchants mostly, city men who would be hard put to make a hard ride. A few local badmen would go, of course, for the excitement. And there were always those who sought a chance for notoriety in safely being in

at the end of Mingo Bill, famed bandit. Ace said to Falcon, "You'll lead them, of course?"

"Of course," Jim said. "I'm ready."

He went out and found the dun cayuse he had ridden to town. The little animal, rested and fed, whinnied as Jim mounted, sunfishing and cavorting until Jim batted down his ears and spoke firmly to him. The posse gathered, as mixed a crew as the marshal had ever seen.

"Get those beeves back," Ledbetter said. "Miss Linda can't afford to lose them. I'm dependin' on you, Falcon."

"But you're not ridin' with me!" Jim said.

The mayor's face darkened, "I'm a city official!" he barked. "I got to stay here. Maybe you and me don't see eye to eye, at that, Falcon. Maybe you better see me when you get back!"

Jim leaned down and said softly, "I've been thinkin' the same thing, Mayor! You better have yourself straight when I come!"

He rode away, leaving Ledbetter staring after him. The mayor did not look happy.



THEY came to Cross Sticks property in mid-afternoon. Guided by Calamity, they soon picked up the trail of the rustlers and cattle. Jim cast about, searching carefully for sign of what he suspected. And there was much loud argument among the posse. Strategies were discussed and rejected. Jim kept silent, still cutting trail about the pasture where the round-up and theft had been pulled off.

Calamity said, "There's twenty of us, five of them. We can easy ride 'em down, and along the way there's other Cross Sticks men. We'll nail 'em before sundown!"

"Calamity's right!" Jim said sharply. "Go ahead! Ride hard and keep your guns ready. Shoot on sight—and bring back those cattle. Calamity's in charge."

They stared at him. "Where you a-go-in', Marshal?" a rider said.

"I got a one-man job to do," the lawman murmured.

They did not believe him. They mut-

tered among themselves. But now they were gripped by the urge of the man-hunt. Calamity, bristling with new importance, was ordering them on. They rode away in a cloud of dust, heading southwest.

Jim made a wider circle, still taking his time, seeking sign to make his theory sound. He rode two miles north, almost to within sight of the ranchhouse where Linda waited. He sighed and rode two miles south of the pasture. It was almost dusk when he found what he wanted.

He turned the dun toward Los Pesos, then, bending forward to speak into the horse's sharp ears. The animal stretched his legs and ran like a frightened rabbit. They came down the road to Los Pesos, roared into Main Street.

The town was filled with milling people. Ace Ledbetter, on the steps of the bank, was being treated by Doc Lewes for a gunshot wound in the left arm. Jim swung down.

"I'm ready for that talk!" he said.

"Four masked men held up the bank," Ledbetter snapped. His cheeks were white, his eyes narrowed. "They went east. Get after them!"

"I'll have a look around, first," Jim said.

"That cattle deal was a feint!" Ledbetter shouted. "I'm positive it was Mingo Bill!" He hesitated. Then, unevenly: "There was a big, white horse—a big man on him—Camp Morton's horse!"

"Ahhh!" Jim said. "The hero turns bank robber! Your own man, eh, Mayor?"

"Get them!" Ledbetter spluttered. "It's your job to bring them in! They got twelve thousand dollars!"

Inside the bank, Jim found the big safe open and papers scattered upon the floor. The lawman went through them expertly. He made neat piles, sorting them, noting mortgages, due bills, other non-negotiable items. He didn't find Baldy Odell's belongings, however. Even in their haste the robbers had removed these humble trifles.

He went back outdoors. A dozen men were ready now, men who had money on deposit in the bank, determined men, solid citizens. They sat in stony silence and watched Falcon take his stand on the steps of the bank. He pushed back the brim of

his hat and said slowly, "We'll have to split up."

"Why?" Ledbetter demanded.

"The Cross Sticks cattle was driven off," the marshal said. "It was a good feint, otherwise the posse'd be back by now, and the herd safe. If Mingo robbed the bank, he'll be joinin' the others. That's southwest. But some of us must follow the trail east. The rest will go after Calamity and the others, in case they got bushwhacked."

"Thet makes sense," a dour posseman said.

"They got an hour's start," Ledbetter rasped. "How come you to be ridin' back alone, Falcon?"

"I swung around and followed your hold-up men into town," Jim said coolly. "There were three of them, and they were joined by two more. That made five. Two men stayed with the Cross Sticks cattle. That's seven. Mingo had four men—and Dirty Dick McCue was hurt. Allowing that Camp Morton joined in, there's still another man to account for. This is gettin' plumb mysterious."

"Four men rode in this job," the dour-faced man said. "We all seen 'em."

"Funny!" Jim said. "How about you goin' east? I aim to travel straight, as I know how to get to where the gang will be."



THE dour man said, "Right!" Part of the posse rode off on the trail of the bandits. The others, at Jim's direction, started southwest. Jim remained alongside Ledbetter, whose arm was now in a sling, and whose face was still paler than his slight wound seemed to call for.

"About that talk," Jim said, after a while.

"You got a job to do," Ledbetter said hoarsely.

"You bet I have," Jim said. "I ought to find out where you were this afternoon. I ought to look around and find where you shucked some clothing and got around to the front and made like you got shot by the bandits. I ought to find how many of the so-called sober citizens of this town were in on deals with Mingo Bill."

"You better be damned careful, Fal-



con," Ledbetter grated. "I'm the boss of this town."

"You were a friend of George Dawes," Jim said. "Funny how men turn out different, ain't it? You started together, raisin' cattle. You both made good, but you weren't satisfied. You had to have a hand in every pie. You came to the town, and it changed you—for the worst."

Ledbetter said, "Damn you! George said—" He stopped.

"Yeah!" Jim nodded. "He probably said the same thing. He was a good man. Lone Luke shot him, but you and the others of the town killed him. I'm aiming to get back a bit of his own for George Dawes, Mayor. I know I can't put you in jail and keep you there. But I'll be back, after this rangdoodle is over, and I don't expect the posses to catch Mingo Bill, either."

"You'd better not come back!" Ledbetter said hoarsely. "You'd better keep on ridin', Falcon. This town won't hold you and me—and I'm stayin'! I made this town, and I'm goin' to be in the damn place when the railroad comes. I'll be Governor of this State, Falcon! And no sand-lappin' young squirt can stop me!"

"You lost your best friend already," Jim said soberly. "Looks like you'd learn a lesson. So long, Mayor! I'll be seein' you—soon!"

He rode swiftly southwestward, over the cold trail, following the posse. He came up to Calamity and the others at midnight. They were dog-tired and confused. The stolen cattle were in a gully, they said, and they were afraid to go in and attack. What did Jim think?

Jim said, "Calamity, come on!"

He took the cowboy down between two boulders. There was a good moon and the cattle seemed contented to rest after being pushed all day. It was easy to round them up and head them for the ranch—because no one was there to stop them!

"I don't get it, Marshal," Calamity said.

"You will," Jim promised. He rode ahead, sending the silent, mystified posse back to Los Pesos. . . .

\* \* \*

The girl was waiting at Cross Sticks,

serenely confident. She said, "I knew you'd bring them back. I couldn't afford to lose such a big herd."

That was good. Jim did not explain it all. He sat and ate a snack, then bade the girl goodnight and repaired to the bunkhouse to sleep for a few hours against the impending day of judgment that would soon come.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Law Badge for an Outcast

JIM WAS up with the sun. Calamity asked a hundred questions, but Jim was chary of answers. He rode away without seeing Linda, leaving the cowhand scratching his head in wonder at cattle stolen, then abandoned.

Jim did not ride directly into Los Pesos. He hobbled the dun in a cove of elders on the edge of town and walked a half mile with that rolling, space-covering stride of his, coming in at the rear of the Criley House. The town was just beginning to stir when he noiselessly mounted the rear stairs two at a time. The sleeping rooms were all on the second floor of the frame building.

He started at the end of the narrow hall and worked to the front. He took note of various dishevelled, sleeping forms, two or three in a room, most of them snoring off last night's wassail. His nose shrank from the odor of stale whiskey. He came to the last door and found it barred.

He did not try to break in. Instead he went through a room on the opposite side, in which a stout cattle buyer lay dreaming peacefully. He opened the window and stepped out upon the porch roof, in plain view of Main Street.

At the window of the room he sought he drew his gun and smashed the glass, then dove through. A shot splintered the sash near his head. He himself fired and the man on the bed cursed once, then slumped over sideways, blood staining the sheet. Jim looked down at Dirty Dick McCue. There was a bandage on his naked torso. And now he was quite dead.

McCue's pants were on a chair. Jim picked them up and went methodically through the pockets. There was a lot of gold pieces—and a small, leaden coin.

Jim reached for Baldy Odell's medalion. The piece from McCue's pocket matched it perfectly. Again the old tale came to Jim's mind, more clearly now. After the war, there had been nightriders, and they had carried this identification symbol. He was, he felt sure, on the right track at last.

It was one thing, he knew, to kill McCue. It was another to scotch the evil ruining a town. No one man could hope to clean up even a portion of the West and make it stick. Sooner or later he would meet his end by very virtue of his notoriety. Gunmen died by the gun. Jim Falcon, a thinking man, had no desire to live or die on the strength of guns alone.

He went out through the door and met a chorus of excited, puzzled voices. Too, he found the pale-faced proprietor at the foot of the stairs.

"McCue is dead, Criley," Falcon said, and held out his open palm, upon which the two lead coins rested. "I'm collecting these things. You can pass the word around."

Criley shrugged and backed away. Jim walked down Main Street, looking neither right nor left. He went into the bank. No one was there but the clerks. Ledbetter's office was empty. Jim sat for a moment in the mayor's chair, figuring things out.

McCue had ridden in with the bandits, and had managed, in the confusion, to get to the hotel, where he could recover from his wound. Ace had met them, and had been forced to ride in with them, either because Mingo Bill had demanded this proof of his cooperation, or because it was the only way he could appear to have been in the bank all afternoon.

There had been four men, one of them on Camp Morton's white horse. McCue, Ledbetter, Mingo Bill—and Morton? Jim thought about that for quite a while. He stared at the door of the big safe. It was closed but not locked. The clerks outside were huddled together and jabbering their heads off. One came to the door and said respectfully, "Where is Mr. Ledbetter?"

"I was about to ask you all," Jim said.

"He's been in here," the clerk said perplexedly. "No one saw him go out. He wouldn't go through that window, would he?"

Jim got up and went to the window.

It was wide open. In the soft ground below were markings not clearly defined, except for holes made by bootheels, as though someone had scuffed hastily over them before making the harder surface beyond.

♦ ♦ ♦

JIM turned. His eyes went again to the huge safe. He crossed the room and jerked open the door. Ace Ledbetter rolled out upon the floor. His throat had been cut. Blood was all over the papers in the safe. There was a big lump on the dead mayor's head.

"Slugged, stuffed in there and cut," Jim said. "Now who in hell was the cause of that?"

The clerk was speechless for a moment. Then: "But no one came in! We could have seen anyone—"

"Through the window!" snapped Falcon. "Very simple. Get the Doc—or get Sim Comisky, rather."

He dropped out the window and took a closer look at the tracks. The marks weren't in any way distinguishable from any other similar heel marks. The murderer had made a clean get-away.

Again out on Main Street, Falcon knew better than to ask questions of Los Pesos people. They all gave him a wide berth this morning. He wondered how many carried the metal disc which bound them to secrecy, and organized them against outsiders.

He walked into his office and stared at the man in the swivel chair. "I'll be damned!" he said. "Who put you afoot, Camp?"

Camp Morton had his boots off. His feet were swollen and his socks cut to ribbons. His face was leaner; a day or two without liquor seemed to have made a big difference. He said, "I was dry-gulched west of town. Lay there all night." He took off his hat and fingered a bloody wound in his head. "They thought they killed me," he added thoughtfully. "I didn't reckon they'd try to go that far."

"There's men in this town," Jim said, "would swear you got that scar in the bank raid yesterday."

"The bank, eh?" Morton said. He seemed quite at ease, and Jim noted that

his guns were handy to his reach. "We can check with Ledbetter on that."

"Ace got his throat injured," Jim said. "With a sharp knife."

Morton blinked. His nostrils pinched in at the base of his nose. "Someone ridin' Whitey in the raid?"

"Yeah," Jim said. "So they say." He pulled out the two lead pieces and held them up. "McCue got his this morning, too. He belonged to this outfit. I reckon I'll have to collect a few more of these doobads. You want to give me yours?"

"Yeah," Morgan said. He slipped his fingers into his fob pocket and laid a third disc in Jim's hand. "Yeah, reckon I do."

Jim opened a desk drawer, reaching past Morton and leaving himself unguarded, so that the ex-marshal could have drawn and shot him with impunity. Jim's every move was deliberate. He found a tiny star in a drawer and dropped it on the desk.

"Baldy said I'd need a deputy," he said. "Guess he was right. But I don't need a man to kill. I want a fella who'll think as I do about a town like Los Pesos."

Morton looked at the silver star. Without taking his eyes from it, he said, "Reckon we got to palaver, young fella. Reckon there's an end to every trail. An' the way I started, when I rode out of town, wasn't the way to my pertickler kind of an end."

"I was raised on stories of you and men like you," Falcon said. "The West eats up its best men. But others come along, and find a job to do, and some day the West will be the nation!"

"I don't savvy too much of that kinda talk," Camp Morton said slowly. "But there's somethin' to be done here. I'm ready to start talkin' before I start actin' . . ."

"I got a horse in the elder clump back of the west road," Jim said. "I'll hire me another. Can you mount quick, behind the jailhouse?"

"I can do anything, now," Morton said. "They sort of got me riled."

"We'll spend the day hiding out at Cross Sticks," Jim said. "Linda'll admire to hear us talk."

Morton winced. He said, "George goin' that way, it liked to finish me. But I'll go with you."

They left Los Pesos by different trails.

The day sped swiftly by as the posses returned to gossip and drink and grasp the fact that Ace Ledbetter and Dirty Dick McCue were added to the list of corpses of the week.



MEN of Los Pesos were congregated in the Palace. There was not a woman present, not even a saloon hostess. Drinks were passed, and the clerk from the bank had to tell his story again and again.

"Nobody went into Ace Ledbetter's office except the new marshal," the man said. "He said someone came through the window and killed Ace. He showed me the footprints, but they were all blurred."

"Camp Morton was in on the robbery," said the dour-faced man of the posse. "Now it looks like this Falcon sliced Ace's gizzard. Seems to me it's time to form a Vigilante Committee!"

The talk went around and around. Whiskey began to inflame impatient men. It was nearly midnight, and passions had mounted high, and practically all of Los Pesos had crowded into the Palace when the rear door opened and a giant of a man stepped through.

Silence fell like a blanket upon the crowded hall. The scars on Mingo Bill's face were livid. Behind him filed his three remaining henchmen; Sad Sam, One-finger Ike and the slippery Lone Luke. They came to the bar, and in one pantherish leap Mingo Bill mounted it and held out his hands for silence.

His bull's voice filled every cranny of the building. "They're blamin' me for things I never done!" he bawled. "You men know me! Plenty of you have done business with me. Now they're sayin' I robbed your bank. It's a damn lie!"

No one spoke. "Camp Morton and this new marshal are in cahoots!" Mingo Bill said. "They stole the Cross Sticks cattle, ran in and held up your bank! This Falcon killed my partner, Ace Ledbetter! I'm aimin' to get him and Morton—they're together right now and Morton's wearin' a star! Falcon pinned it on him! I know, I tell you!"

A murmur arose and Mingo Bill held on shrewdly. "You men of the Lead Bat-

talion! You know me! I'm one of you—a Texan born and bred. I aimed to help put our own Ace Ledbetter in the Governor's chair and make us all prosperous! I worked with him, agin everyone and everything else. Now Ace is gone—murdered by this newcomer, this low, stinkin' rat of a sand-lapper!"

A throaty assent began building. The gaudy shirts of Mingo Bill and his men became the center of a milling crowd. The bull voice went on, expostulating, making wild accusations. The tin horns, and many of the citizens of Los Pesos, were agreeing with him.

"We got to find that pair and hang 'em!" Mingo Bill said. "Nobody is safe in this county with Morgan and Falcon around!"

The batwing doors to Main Street swung wide and Jim Falcon's voice cut sharply across the room. "You're pretty damn near right at that, Bill! No member of the Lead Battalion is safe unless he turns his badge over to me! I'm collectin' them."

Camp Morton slid by Jim, moved to the bar and climbed to its top. The big ex-marshal wore his deputy's star in plain sight upon his wide, blue-flanneled shirt. His feet were jammed into shoes with low heels—an incongruous touch—and his face was drawn with the pain of his wound.

Then something happened to the crowd. One moment men were clamoring about Mingo Bill. The next they were seeking shelter, or going clean on out of the building. In a trice, only a dozen or so were left scowling, staring from the outlaws to Falcon and Morton.

"Camp will tell you about it," Jim said. "He was one of you."

Without giving anyone a chance to interrupt, Camp Morton said, "I thought the Lead Battalion was to back Ledbetter politically. I didn't know Ace would tie in with Mingo Bill. When he did—I was drinkin' so much it didn't seem to matter, and Arizona and New Mexican steers meant nothing to me. But when a good man like George Dawes gets killed—and when someone rides my hoss Whitey in to hold up the bank—and when I find out that Mingo Bill is dictatin' to Ledbetter how things'll be run—and when I see Los Pesos run by outlaws and cut-throats—I

turned in my medallion. And now—cut loose your wolf, Bill!"

"I'm appealin' to this crowd of local men," Mingo Bill shouted. "Who's got anything on me? Who can say I ever harmed a man of our crowd? Or a citizen of Los Pesos?"

"What about George Dawes?" Falcon snapped.

The dour man of the posse was one who remained on his feet, listening. He said, "George was lookin' for trouble."

There was assent from the others. Jim said quickly, "He was looking for justice!"

"Yes!" Morton said. "He wanted Mingo Bill Locked up. I had orders to turn him loose. The orders was from Ledbetter!"

"He's thrown' off on the dead!" Mingo Bill howled.

"You're all talkin' too much," Lone Luke said softly.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Death is Empire's Milestone

GAUDY shirts had deployed, inch by inch, looking for the best positions. Jim said promptly, "You see them! They're spoilin' for a shoot-out. I want this town cooled off right. I want this town to be in shape to meet the future, when the railheads reach here!"

"Say, who the hell are you?" the dour man demanded. "You're mighty damn anxious about Los Pesos, for a stranger."

Jim hesitated. To make a move would be disastrous, both to his safety and to the pursuance of his cause. He wanted to eliminate Mingo Bill, but he did not want to have to tangle with townsfolk, however guilty they may have been in the past in harboring the outlaws. He looked up at Morton for an instant.

The big veteran was standing flatfooted, thumbs caught in his belt, sixguns strapped tightly to his thighs. Camp Morton was perfectly calm. His eyes were upon Mingo Bill; he did not even return Jim's glance. He was like an image, up there on the opposite end of the bar from the man who had been his undoing. He was a plain target for any chance shot, and he knew it, and he did not care.

Mingo Bill, however, did care. Jim knew at a glance that the outlaw was shifting, meaning to throw himself behind the bar when the action began. Yet Mingo did not dare start it. He needed the favor of the town. Without the support he had so boldly bid for, he would have to run for the hills and hide the rest of his days.

Mingo had traveled high, wide and free for too long. This was his chance to move in on his dead partner, to take over the politics of Los Pesos, to turn respectable. If he could unload his sins upon the dead persons of Camp Morton and Jim Falcon, he would be successful. Jim prayed that Camp would not draw first.

Jim said, "I'm Jim Falcon. I'm a Texan. I've been a cowboy, a surveyor, a railroad man. Right now, I'm a detective for the roads—and I came here to find out who was stirring up trouble against decent people."

Mingo Bill howled, "A railroad dick! A dirty Pinkerton!"

"That's a lie!" Jim said coolly. "You know it's a lie. You're a filthy, murdering scoundrel. You sent One-finger to cut Ace's throat. You held up the bank, Mingo Bill. You shot Camp Morton, stole his horse. You put Ledbetter on the white horse, made him ride in, then led the horse out of town." He made his voice hard, taunting. He had to work fast, before Camp started. He wanted the outlaws to begin the war. It had to come—and he wanted the town on his side.

"The railroads want this to be a decent district for their employees to live in and raise families. You're the kind nobody wants in his town, Mingo Bill! You and your cutthroats and your fake Lead Battalion have got to go!"

Lone Luke was over by the windows. His hands slipped cautiously out of sight. The spectators were spellbound by the exchange, awaiting fireworks between Mingo Bill and Jim or Camp Morton. Nobody noticed Lone Luke.

Nobody, that is, except Falcon. Jim had been waiting for this. Out of the corner of his eye, without turning his head, he was watching Luke. He took a step forward now, making no effort to reach for his gun. He balanced his weight.

"You're under arrest, all four of you damned outlaws!" he said loudly.

Luke's hand came up with a short-barreled hideout gun—a weapon noted for its inaccuracy at long range. Jim took a quick step; still he did not draw. Luke's shot sounded loud in the room. A bottle on the bar smashed into a thousand pieces. Jim was untouched.

After that everything happened at once. Mingo Bill screamed defiance and went for his Colt. The sixgun came up flaming. Sad Sam and One-finger Ike went into action.

Up on the bar, Camp Morton did not seem fast. He simply threw both hands loose from his belt, and brought them forward. As Mingo Bill's gun spoke, Morton's roared too.

Jim Falcon dropped to one knee. Spectators were prone, digging into what shelter they could find. The dour man was rolling under a table, ramming a tinhorn trying for the same spot. Jim chuckled a little, and turned his gun on Luke.

Luke fired twice more. Jim's hat sailed from his head. His gun roared once. Luke fired a fourth shot. It went into the ceiling. Jim's change of position, perfectly timed, had spoiled Luke's aim. Jim's one shot finished Lone Luke's career.

A slug tore at Jim's shirt. He slithered to one side, always moving, and sighted on Sad Sam. He nailed the lugubrious one in the middle of his head as he plunged forward, fanning his gun. He got a brief glance at Camp Morton. The big man was standing upright, knees bent, gun flaming. One-finger Ike was tumbling, falling, coming all apart. Mingo Bill was down on one knee, amazement, chagrin and fear mingling on his countenance.

Camp's gun was empty. He flung it at Mingo Bill, started down the bar, staggering a little, eager to get to grips with the outlaw. Jim straightened around and brought up his steady gun. Bill tried to fire at Camp. Jim's single shot, an anticlimax to the fanfare of gunfire, broke the stillness. Mingo Bill went backward off the bar.



HALF way down, Camp hesitated as his enemy fell. He turned and grinned down at Jim, managing to draw himself to his full height. He said

"That's showin' 'em, pardner! That's the way to run a shoot-out!" Then he fell.

Jim leaped to break the force of the tumble. He wrapped both arms around the burly, sagging body. He succeeded in easing Morton to the floor.

Doc Lewes was coming in the door. Sim Comisky's head was stuck through a window, as though he were counting corpses for the morrow's business. The dour man struggled out and sat up. Los Pesos citizens breathed again.

Camp Morton was smiling. The lines of dissipation had miraculously gone from his face. He said in a clear voice, "Time to cash in those Lead Battalion pieces, men! Time to cash in . . ."

His head did not droop, even in death. Lewes bent over him, said sharply, "Hell! Camp was hit right smack in the heart! Now how in the hell did he talk like that?"

Jim stood up. "Maybe Camp's heart was a little bigger than some others," he said. "He could have got away from Los Pesos. He came back—and threw in with

me because he wanted to do something for the town. You men can put those lead medallions in Camp's hat as you pass out. The war is over!"

He read the victory in their bowed heads. He did not wait to see who deposited their pocket pieces in the fake society of Texans in the hat of dead Camp Morton. He had accomplished his mission. He went out and down to the office of the town marshal.

He unpinned the star from his shirt, wrote out his resignation, left them in plain sight. He saluted silently the chair and desk which had been Camp Morton's. He lingered on the spot where George Dawes had died.

Then he went out and got on the dun mustang and rode toward Cross Sticks Ranch. Somewhere there was the extra man who had ridden with Mingo Bill. Calamity might know who the traitor was—and there would be one more lead disc to collect before he could take time to speak with Linda Dawes about a certain thing.

THE END



Sailors  
Marines

## YOUR MAN-IN-THE-SERVICE IS STORY HUNGRY

Send him 5 magazines for 25c

Are you willing to spend a quarter to send him the equivalent of 5 book-length novels of fresh, new, exciting fiction?  
... Here's how!!

(This offer for Armed Services ONLY)

Cheek classification in coupon, fill in name and address and send 25c for 5 magazines (equal to 5 book-length novels) or 50c for 12 Magazines. (equal to 12 book-length novels). The magazine types you select will be taken from the outstanding fiction magazines of today, all published by "POPULAR PUBLICATIONS", America's largest ALL-FICTION Magazine Group.



Soldiers  
Flyers

### MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!

(Indicate number of each type)

|                 |                          |                 |                          |                     |                          |
|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Adventure ..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Detective ..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Air .....           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Western .....   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Mystery .....   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fantastic .....     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Love .....      | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sports .....    | <input type="checkbox"/> | Miscellaneous ..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Popular Publications, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York City.

I enclose (25c) (50c) for the magazines I've checked. Please send them to:

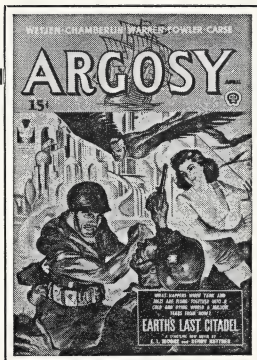
Name .....

Address .....

If you wish to send more than one package write kind of magazines desired and address on separate sheet of paper.

(Offer Good in United States Only)

America's  
Oldest  
and Best  
All-Fiction  
Magazine



Stories  
of  
Adventure  
'Round  
the World

*A Great New Fantastic Novel*

### **EARTH'S LAST CITADEL**

By C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner

*Three Exceptional Novelettes*

### **MANILA MIRACLE**

by William Chamberlain

**WARRIOR BREED**  
by William R. Cox

**FINISH PYLON**  
by Peter Dawson

*Five Stirring Short Stories*

by Albert Richard Wetjen, Charles Marquis Warren, Bertram  
B. Fowler, and other well known writers.

**DON'T MISS THE APRIL ARGOSY**

**On Sale Now!**





*Little Bill Abbot remembered well the day his daddy died, so it was with a light heart that he swapped a badly-fitted horseshoe for a dead owlhoot and five thousand golden dollars. . . .*



Deliberately, the leader shot Bill Abbot down.

By GUNNISON STEELE

## MR. DEATH—BLACKSMITH!

**L**ITTLE BILL ABBOT was inside his shack, starting to fix supper, when he heard a quick clatter of hoofs along the trail from China Flats. Little Bill stood a moment, dark head on one side, frowning, as the sounds drew nearer. Then, limping a little on his bad leg, he went outside.

Just then a rider, spurring along the trail, saw him and swerved toward him. The rider was a big, dark-faced hombre with eyes like black agates. He dragged

his horse—a long-legged, powerful roan—to a slithering halt a few yards away, jumped to the ground and paced toward Little Bill, six-shooter in hand.

"You here all alone, kid?" he rapped.

Little Bill, just seventeen, was slender and thin-faced. He nodded, eyes narrowing on the big hombre's hard face.

"All alone."

"I'm in luck!" The dark rider grinned, flicking a glance at the shed-like structure a hundred feet away beside the trail which

carried a rude BLACKSMITH sign. "I *thought* there ought to be a blacksmith shop about here. My bronc's been limpin' for the last mile—a loose shoe, I reckon. Your job's to fix it, *my pronto!*"

Little Bill said, "Sure, I'll fix it. Wait till I go inside and—"

"And mebby get a gun, huh?" The big man laughed harshly. "Do I look like a sap? Look, young 'un, it won't hurt you, nor me, to know I just held up the China Flats bank and got a bunch of money. Before I could get away I had to kill a couple of men. A sheriff's posse can't be far behind me. So you do what I say, or I'll fill your hide so fulla holes it won't hold shucks. Now, get over to that smithy!"

Little Bill did as he was told, because he knew he would die quickly if he didn't. He recognized the dark-faced rider. His name was Ace Rhett, and he was a cold-blooded killer. Rhett followed close behind Little Bill as he went toward the blacksmith shop, gun in hand, leading the limping roan.

Little Bill looked at the roan's right forefoot. "Threw a shoe. Needs a new one."

Ace Rhett swore, looking back along the trail. "Hurry, then—and don't try any tricks, like killin' time. Get busy!"

Little Bill started kindling a fire in the cold forge. Ace Rhett sat down on a keg and watched him suspiciously. Little Bill's mind was busy as he worked. He was remembering another time, almost six years ago.

It had been about this time of day, almost sundown, when three hard-faced riders had spurred their mounts along the trail and stopped at the smithy. Big Bill Abbot, Little Bill's father, had been here then. A horse belonging to one of the riders had gone lame, and, guns in hand, they'd told Big Bill to do something about it.

Big Bill Abbot, knowing they were outlaws, but not wanting trouble, had complied. Tow-headed Little Bill, bringing his father a horseshoe, had stumbled over one of the outlaws' feet. Angrily, the owl-hooter had slapped the button against the shop wall. And Big Bill had leaped upon the owl-hooter.

Deliberately, the leader of the three had

shot Bill Abbot down. Little Bill, in trying to help his father, had been given a brutal slapping around. They'd ridden off and left him, half-conscious, with a broken leg. And because he'd lain there a day and night before help came, the leg had never mended right.

Little Bill had stayed on there, not forgetting, putting to use what his father had taught him about blacksmithing. Ranchers for miles around brought their tools to him to be mended, their horses to be shod. As time passed, he'd learned that two of those outlaws had been killed in fights with the law. The third, the leader, was still at large.

That man was Ace Rhett.



ACE RHETT had been looking closely at Little Bill as he fitted the shoe on the roan's hoof. "Me and a couple of others stopped here once before," he said. "We'd robbed a stage, that time, and one of our broncs had gone lame. There was a man here then. He was a good shoer, but he didn't have much sense. He started a ruckus, and we had to beef him. There was a button here, too. You couldn't be that button, now, could you?"

Little Bill nodded, without looking up—because he didn't want Rhett to see what was in his eyes—and said, "I sure could!"

Rhett laughed. "A salty little cuss, I remember. You ain't filled out much, either."

Because of that brutal beating he'd got, Little Bill wanted to say. Because he'd had to work hard, sometimes without enough to eat, dreaming hopelessly of the time when he could have a little cow spread of his own and win the respect of other folks. But his lips tightened and he said nothing.

"It ain't over twenty miles to old Mexico," Ace Rhett was saying. "With this roan in good shape, that posse won't have a chance of catchin' me. I'll live like a king on that sackful of money there on my saddle. You about through with that pony?"

"All through," Little Bill said, stepping back from the roan.

Rhett got up quickly, led the roan a few steps to make sure it was all right, then swung into the saddle.

"You done a good job, kid," he said, grinning down at Little Bill. He took a ten-dollar bill from the bulging sack on the saddlehorn and let it flutter to the ground at Little Bill's feet. "That shows I'm honest. That posse ought to be along any minute now. You tell that hick sheriff he'll have to get a lot smarter before he catches Ace Rhett! Those damn fools will never learn."

Then the big outlaw spurred and rode away fast.

Little Bill watched him out of sight. Rhett had been right—a posse would never overtake him on that powerful roan. The killer would make it across the Border, and it might be years before he showed up in this part of the country again.

Rhett was right about the posse, too. Pretty soon three riders pounded along the trail and halted their sweaty horses when they saw Little Bill standing there before the smithy. Sheriff Jess Krupp, leader of the three, was a blocky, blond, hawk-faced man. Sheriff Krupp was arrogant, contemptuous of other men, but ruthless and tough when dealing with law-breakers.

"You see a big, dark gent pass this way?" he asked Little Bill. "He was

ridin' a hammer-headed roan. You see that hombre?"

Little Bill nodded. "His bronc had gone lame, and I put on a new shoe. He left less than five minutes ago."

The sheriff swore. "Why didn't you stall for time? Oh, well—we'll get the skunk anyhow."

"Wait," Little Bill called, as they started to ride away. "I got a gun and a horse—can't I ride with you? I might come in handy."

Sheriff Krupp laughed. "You're just a button—you couldn't help us. You'd just be in the way!"

The three thundered away in a cloud of dust.

Little Bill whirled, dived into his cabin, and came out a moment later strapping a long-barreled old six-shooter about his skinny waist. His daddy's gun. He ran to the stable nearby, slapped bridle and saddle on a sway-backed sorrel, mounted and sent the sorrel at a gallop down the trail in the direction the others had taken. By now the sun was down and shadows were gathering fast. It would have been dark before he'd gone a mile, except for a white moon in the sky.

Little Bill knew he didn't have a chance of overtaking the posse. And he knew the main reason Sheriff Krupp hadn't wanted him along was because there was a big bounty on Ace Rhett, and they didn't



### THE WEST SALUTES THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T DIE!

He was a runaway from tyranny, a wanderer of the wastelands, but when human wolves declared no-quarter war on the free birthright of the frontier, he came back home to prove in blood that when men are too weak, too sly—or too damned yellow—to fight for the land of their birth, they no longer deserve to live!

You'll thrill to Morgan Lewis's flaming lead novel, "DEATH WAITS AT DEVIL'S CREEK," and six other smashing rangeland yarns in this big issue! Reserve your copy today! On sale now!

THE COWBOY'S MAGAZINE  
**10¢ Ace-High**  
**WESTERN** MAGAZINE  
**STORIES**

want to split it with anybody. His heels thumping the sorrel's ribs, Little Bill raced along the trail, looking straight ahead, until he'd gone five or six miles over rough country.

Then he stopped the sorrel and dismounted. It was tough country here, with cliffs and brush-clogged ravines on each side of the trail. Little Bill eased along the side of the trail for a hundred yards, scanning the ground, before he found what he was looking for. Then he tied the sorrel to a sapling, and went forward afoot through the thorny *malpais*. He moved cautiously.

He went slowly, pausing occasionally to listen. For a long while he could hear only the wind, and the owls and coyotes in the brush. Then, dimly, he heard the sounds of a slow-moving horse ahead. He moved forward faster, silent as a shadow, eyes and ears alert. His heart was pounding like a trip-hammer.

The sounds ahead stopped abruptly. Little Bill paused briefly, then moved forward again. And suddenly, in a moonlit clearing ahead, he saw a man and a horse. The man was Ace Rhett. Rhett was on the ground, doing something to his saddle.

Little Bill stepped into the little clearing.

Flatly, he said, "All right, Rhett—this is the button you smashed and left to die, six years ago. I'm callin' for a show-down!"

Ace Rhett seemed to freeze for five seconds. Then he whirled suddenly, spitting and wheeling in mid-air like an angry cat, grabbing for his gun. And Ace Rhett was very, very fast.

Little Bill grabbed for his old Peacemaker at the same time. Grabbed with all the incredible speed and smooth coordination that he'd cultivated so painstakingly for six long years, waiting for just this moment. Red flame lashed out, gun thunder rolled, echoing among the surrounding cliffs.

Ace Rhett jerked convulsively, his gun half drawn, amazement and terror on his cruel face—then he fell forward on his face and lay there still.

It was several hours before the sheriff and his two deputies came slowly back along the trail, gloomy and ill-humored because their quarry had escaped. They swore amazedly when they saw Little Bill Abbot waiting there beside the trail for them; their amazement increased when they saw Ace Rhett, draped face-down across the crippled roan. And Rhett was deadlier than hell.

"You've got \$5,000 in bounty money comin' to you, kid," the crestfallen sheriff said after a while. "But what I can't savvy is how you guessed Ace Rhett would take to the brush that way, instead of high-tailin' it on across the Border where he'd be certain safe."

"It wasn't just a guess," Little Bill said slowly.

"That don't make sense, kid. What do you mean, it wasn't a guess?" The sheriff scratched his head.

"I knew he'd *have* to turn off the trail, or let you gents capture him," Little Bill said quietly. "I put a shoe on Ace Rhett's roan, all right, but not the way Rhett wanted it. And I knew just about to the yard how far that roan could travel before goin' lame again!"



To Our Readers in the Armed Forces—

## TELL IT TO YOUR C.O.!

Wherever you are sent—right here in America or in the battle zones overseas—your favorite Popular Publications magazine will follow you. If you have any trouble placing your subscription, ask your commanding officer to put it through. He gives us the orders too!



Symbol of the Best in Brand-new Fiction!

Six men rushed quickly from the defense semi-circle to dispatch the Indian wounded.



By  
**PHILIP KETCHUM**

## STRING OUT—FOR HELL!

● *Jim Holden's self-imposed chore was to knife through*  
● *that ring of raging Sioux and save a doom-bound wagon*  
● *train—then surrender to the white men's hangrope!* ●

IT was after dark when Jim Holden got back to the place where the wagon train had stopped for the night. While he ate supper he kept thinking of the smoke signals he had seen during the day. He was more worried than he was willing to admit. This was the last train out of Westport for Oregon this year. They were half way to Fort Laramie but had been held up for two days by a breakdown of one of the heavily-loaded wagons

and the illness of John Landover. That meant they were quite a way behind the train ahead. Jim didn't like that.

So far as he knew, there had been little trouble with Indians this year. In fact, in no one of the three years he had served as scout had there been much trouble for any outfit that stayed on the trail, took the usual precautions and didn't get too far away from the unit ahead and that behind. It was the stragglers, those who

were careless and those who left the trail who ran into trouble.

Thomas Belcher joined him to ask questions about the next day's journey. Jim mentioned the smoke signal he had seen and asked that the usual night guard be doubled. He didn't want Belcher to get all worked up, but he thought he could trust the short, heavy-set man who had been elected company captain. Belcher had shown good judgment on several occasions.

After Belcher had left, Ann Landover came up to where Jim was sitting and took a place near him. "It was hot today, Jim," she said plaintively. "When is it ever going to rain?"

Jim shrugged. "Next month, maybe," he said. "Tomorrow, perhaps."

Ann sighed. She sat down, wrapped her arms around her knees and stared at the ground. "Jim, what's the matter with me?" she said.

Holden scowled. Ann's presence here, so close to him, was embarrassing; he wished that she would go back to her wagon. Ann was John Landover's wife. She was much younger than John, and Jim knew they didn't get along very well. He could understand that, for Landover was a gruff, surly man, a poor companion for the woman. Just the same, Jim wished that she would keep away from him. Others in the company, he was sure, were beginning to notice how Ann was always following him around.

"I've got to check up on the guard," Jim said shortly.

With that crack, he got to his feet and hurried away. Henry McArdle was in charge of the guard. McArdle was tall, thin; he had been hired as one of Landover's drivers. Three wagons in the company belonged to Landover and were loaded with merchandise for Oregon.

"All quiet, McArdle?" Holden asked.

The man nodded. "Sure," he said. "Just like any other night. What did you expect?"

"Trouble, maybe!"

"If you mean Injun trouble," McArdle laughed, "let 'em come. We're ready for 'em any old time."

Two other men, Aaron Hollis and Matt Card, joined them. Hollis and Card had been detailed as extra guards, and didn't

like it. From what they said, Jim knew that they blamed him for the sleep they were losing. Card was especially bitter, but a part of the man's feelings, Jim knew, might stem from trouble he had had with Card just after they had left Westport.

Jim had broken in on a poker game in a wagon one night when stakes were high. He had reported the incident to Belcher and, on his recommendation, Belcher had ruled that there would be no more gambling. There was a good reason for that, Jim felt. This company faced months on the trail and the men here had only what they had brought. Gambling could lead to a lot of friction and hell-raising.

After a time, Holden headed for the place where he bunked. He rolled in his blankets but for quite a while couldn't sleep. The feeling that trouble was ahead was too strong. He sat up once and stared off through the darkness, not sure what it was that had suddenly startled him.

Some time later a hand on his shoulder woke him and he heard a voice whispering his name. He threw back his blankets and reached for his boots. While he was bent over, a heavy blow caught him on the side of his head, half stunning him.

There wasn't time to figure it out. Holden managed to come erect. He lunged out at the blurred figure near him but, though his fists smashed home, another blow rocked him backward. He tripped and went down and a man's boot caught him viciously in the jaw. Jim rolled away from another slashing kick and got to his knees, but the man was on him again. Pain exploded in the back of his head and he lost consciousness.



THE murmur of many voices reached through the fog which held him. Jim Holden blinked open his eyes and sat up. There was a splitting pain in his head. Jim realized, vaguely, that the campfire had been built up again and that he was near it and that practically every man in the company was gathered around him. A good many women were in the background, too.

A half-formed question came from his lips but Jim knew that it didn't make

sense. He closed his eyes against a sudden dizziness, then opened them again.

"All right, Hollis," Tom Belcher ordered, "tie him up! We'll deal with him in the morning."

There was a cold, sharp note in Belcher's voice. Jim tried to struggle to his feet, but someone grabbed him and he felt a rope passed around his body and made tight, lashing his arms to his sides.

"What's this all about, Belcher?" he gasped. "What have I done? Why—"

"Let's finish it now, Belcher," a heavy voice said. "Why hold up our journey tomorrow? He's guilty as hell."

"Guilty of what?" Jim rasped.

"Murder, Holden," Henry McArdle said. "I only wish Landover had lasted long enough to finish you."

Belcher looked around at the assembled crowd and came to a decision. "Holden," he said, "you are charged with the murder of John Landover. You went to his wagon an hour ago to see his wife, and when Landover objected, you attacked him with a knife. Though seriously wounded, Landover fought back. The men on guard heard the struggle. They found Landover's body sprawled across yours. What have you got to say for yourself?"

There was something unreal about all this. Jim shook his head. "It's all a lie! Someone woke me and as I reached for my boots, struck me over the head. I don't know who it was. I—"

Jim broke off and stared at the ring of faces. He could see that no one here believed what he had said. The story sounded weak even to his own ears.

"I'm afraid that won't do, Holden," Belcher said bluntly. "Ann Landover saw the fight between you and her husband. A lie will gain you nothing."

Jim shook his head. It couldn't be true that Ann had seen the fight, for there hadn't been one. He looked around for her but the woman wasn't there. What time it was he didn't know, but it must be near morning. There was a faint glow in the eastern sky.

"Anything more to say, Holden?" Belcher asked.

"I'd like to see Ann Landover," Jim said.

Belcher shook his head. "Probably so," he remarked dryly. "But I don't think

Ann wants to see you." Belcher paused and glanced from face to face. "We'll bury Landover in the morning—and with him, his murderer."

There was no more trial than that, nor would there be in the morning, Jim realized. He was securely bound and left lying near the fire. Most of the members of the company drifted back to their wagons. Belcher and several others sat down some distance away to await the dawn and the task that faced them then.

For a while it was almost impossible for Jim to organize his thoughts. In another hour or, at the most, two, it would be light enough for a hanging. Justice along the trail was swift and sure.

Feverish desperation crowded him. Jim could see and understand the background which made it possible for these men to believe him guilty. They had noticed Ann's interest in him and had blamed him for it. When he had been found, then, unconscious and under Landover's dead body, it had been easy to believe that he had gone to Landover's wagon and started the fight.

But the fight hadn't been there. He had been knocked unconscious some distance away and had been carried to the spot where he had been found. And Ann Landover had lied, coldly and deliberately. Jim couldn't understand that at all. She had been interested in him. It didn't make sense that she would say the words which would cause him to be hanged.

The light in the eastern sky grew steadily brighter. It seemed to Jim that he had never seen a dawn come so fast. The shadows which had held the distant wagons of the enclosure lifted and faded and suddenly Tom Belcher got to his feet.

"Let's get it over," he said grimly. "We'll walk down along the river a ways, out of sight of the camp."

The others in the group nodded and they approached the place where Jim was lying and pulled him to his feet. Belcher wouldn't look at him and neither would the others. A rope was coiled over Hollis's arm.

Belcher started to speak again but he never finished. A high, shrill scream broke the stillness of the early dawn. It came from just outside the enclosure and was echoed by more screams and the



hoarse, alarmed shouting of the men on guard. Then the stuttering roar of their rifles began.

"*Injuns!*" Hollis gasped.



HE dropped his rope and turned and raced for his wagon. Belcher and the others were hurrying away, too, and from every side, now, came the spatter of gunfire. There hadn't been much sleep in camp that night, and perhaps it was just as well, for though some of the Indians who had surrounded the encampment and who had crept up on it through the darkness managed to gain the wagons, they were met with a withering fire which hurled them back into the sheltering shadows.

Almost at once, it seemed, the Indians reformed their lines and came on again, but the steady firing of the men in the company stopped them. Arrows and spears rained into the camp; one grazed Jim's shoulder, another struck a woman in the arm. Jim had been struggling vainly at his bonds and after the second attack was broken he shouted for Belcher. He didn't intend to stay here, out of the fight, and wait helplessly until the redskins came whooping in to claim his scalp.

Belcher had no time for him just then, however. He was moving from wagon to wagon, encouraging his men. Several had been wounded and one man had apparently been killed. Jim couldn't see who it was.

The women started a fire and heated water and a make-shift breakfast was prepared and finally Belcher came up and stopped at Jim's side.

"*Sioux?*" he asked bluntly.

Jim nodded. He understood, now, the meaning of the smoke signals he had seen the afternoon before. "How many are there?"

"I don't know. The prairie seems alive with them."

"We're the last wagon train," Jim said almost to himself. "We're a couple days behind the nearest help we could expect. They knew they'd be pretty safe in attacking us."

Belcher stooped over and cut the bonds which held Jim's arm. "This doesn't

change things," he said grimly. "If you want to fight with us you can. After this is over you still have to face the charge of murder."

Jim said nothing. He rubbed his arms to get the stiffness out of them, then went to get his rifle. Screams were again sounding from beyond the enclosure, but the Indians weren't charging on foot. They had mounted ponies and were circling the enclosure, peppering it with arrows and riding closer and closer. A steady patter of gunfire lashed out at them. Now and then a pony went down or a rider lost his seat.

Jim hunted up Belcher. "Pass the word around to be careful of ammunition," he said. "This can go on for a long time. Until the *Injuns* get a lot closer they can't get inside, but we can use up all the bullets we have in a few hours if we keep firing like this."

Belcher agreed and started around the enclosure and Jim settled down to wait. Now and then, when a rider came too close, he would lift his rifle to his shoulder and fire.

A couple hours and the Indians tired and withdrew. Six wagon men rushed quickly from their defense semi-circle and dispatched the Indian wounded. That done, they returned quickly—under constant fire.

Jim guessed that there were at least three hundred in the band of braves that had withdrawn. He tried to look ahead and didn't like what he saw. He didn't think the enemy would make another attack on the enclosure, at least for a while. Many in this band had probably participated in other attacks such as this. They knew the cost of a direct attack and there was nothing to hurry them. For their purposes, there was all the time in the world.

Tonight, Jim felt, they would surround the encampment. Tomorrow there would be another dawn attack and more circling if it was unsuccessful. But gradually, and there wasn't any question of this, the train's ammunition would run low and one by one the pioneers would drop. On the third day, or maybe the fourth, the Indians would swarm between the wagons and everything would be over. Time meant nothing to them.

THE hours dragged. Jim speculated on the possibility of getting away and reaching the train ahead. But he figured the chances were too slim. The group ahead might be fifty miles up the trail by now, and even if they were nearer it would take luck to break through the Indian lines.

In mid-afternoon Belcher joined him for a while and asked him about that possibility. Jim shook his head. "I *might* make it," he said slowly, "but I'm afraid I couldn't."

"I wasn't thinking of you," Belcher said bluntly. "You'll stay with the rest of us, Holden. If you got away you might forget to send anyone back. We aren't taking any chances on that."

Sudden, hot anger surged through Jim. He looked steadily at the older man. "I didn't kill Landover," he said quietly. "I don't care how it looked, I didn't kill him. Anyone with a grain of sense in his head ought to know that. I still want to talk to his wife."

"She's been wounded, Holden. Pretty bad."

"Ask her who really came to her husband's wagon last night."

"I've already heard her story."

Jim's lips tightened. He had tried, desperately, to figure out who had jumped him the night before and his mind had settled on Matt Card. It was only a suspicion, however. He hadn't seen the man well enough in the darkness to have had any idea who he was. And he had tried to figure things out from another angle. He had tried to guess what man in the company was interested enough in Ann to want her husband out of the way. Such speculation, however, had brought him no answer.

"Any way things work out, I lose," he muttered. "If we beat off the Injuns, it's a rope."

Belcher made no reply. He moved off across the enclosure.

Heavy clouds came up toward evening and darkness closed in early. Jim ate the food that was brought to him. Not far away from where he crouched, Belcher and a group of men held a conference. When it was over, everyone crowded around a chap named Rockbridge and shook hands with him. A little later Rock-

bridge squirmed under one of the wagons and disappeared. Until then, Jim hadn't guessed what was happening. If he had, he would have stopped the man, for Rockbridge was big and clumsy and had no chance at all of getting through the Indian lines.

Five minutes passed—then five minutes more—and suddenly he heard Rockbridge's scream, high and shrill. It was choked off in the middle and Jim and every man in the enclosure knew what had happened.

Jim got to his feet and walked over to where Belcher and a few other men were standing.

"Who's to be next?" he asked flatly. "Is someone else going to try it?"

Belcher sucked in a haggard breath. "We've got to get help."

"Then take the best chance you've got. Let me go. I might get through. I might—"

"And you might forget to come back." "I'd come back," Jim said, trying to keep his temper in check.

Tom Belcher shook his head. "We'll draw lots. The rest of us."

Most of the men in the group nodded in sober agreement.

"You'll draw lots," Jim said bitterly. "You'll draw lots again and again and one by one you'll go out there and be killed. Pretty soon there'll not be enough of you left to fight off the Injuns if someone does get through. I'm going myself, Belcher. If I don't make it I've saved you a dirty job. If I do I'll come back and let you hang me and to hell with you and your whole crowd."

As he finished speaking, Jim turned his back on the men and headed toward the edge of the enclosure. Belcher shouted at him to stop but he didn't. He heard the click of a gun-lock but he wouldn't even look back.

"Let him go," said the coarse voice of Henry McArdle. "He'll never get through, Belcher. The Injuns'll take care of him."

Jim reached the wagon where he had spent most of the day. A barricade had been built up under it, a barricade of boxes of food. Between them was the place through which he had fired his rifle. Working quietly, Jim enlarged the open-

# If You Get Up Nights You Can't Feel Right

If you have to get up 8 or more times a night your rest is broken and it's no wonder if you feel old and run down before your time. Functional rather than organic systemic Kidney and Bladder trouble often may be the cause of many pains and symptoms simply because the Kidneys may be tired and not working fast enough in filtering and removing irritating excess acids, poisons and wastes from your blood. So if you get up nights or suffer from burning, scanty or frequent passages, leg pains, backache, or swollen ankles, due to non-organic or non-systemic Kidney and Bladder troubles, you'll make no mistake in trying the prescription called Cystex. Because it has given such joyous, happy relief in so high a percentage of such cases, Cystex is sold under a guarantee of money back on return of empty package unless completely satisfactory. Cystex costs only 35c at drugstore.

## High School Course at Home Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H.S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and society. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request.

American School, Dept. H449, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

## ARMY-NAVY BARGAINS

|                    |       |                       |       |
|--------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|
| Leather belt ..... | \$.75 | Cart. belt .....      | \$.60 |
| Gun sling .....    | .50   | Rope lariat .....     | .75   |
| Short shovel ..... | .85   | Sword bayonet .....   | 1.75  |
| Hobbles .....      | .50   | Model cannon 7" ..... | 1.75  |

50th Anniversary Catalog 1895-1940, 308 pages, over 2,000 illustrations of pistols, rifles, daggers, models, saddles, etc., mailed for 50 cents. 1945 circular for 5c stamp.

FRANCIS BANNERMAN SONS, 501 Broadway, New York

## TOMBSTONES

DIRECT TO YOU \$995

Genuine beautiful ROCKDALE  
Monuments, Markers, Satisfaction  
or Money Back. Free lettering. **NEW**  
catalog. Freight paid. Compare our prices.

Rockdale Monument Co., Dept. 743, Joliet, Ill.



## NEW WRITERS NEEDED

New writers needed to re-write ideas in newspapers, magazines and books. Splendid opportunity to "break into" fascinating writing field. May bring you up to \$5.00 per hour spare time. Experience unnecessary. Write today for FREE details. NO OBLIGATION. Postcard will do. Comfort Writer's Service, Dept. FM172, St. Louis, Mo.

**FREE**  
DETAILS



Crush through to biggest shoe profits in years with sensational new soft-shoelace leather Military Shoes for Men of Action—also hundreds of other fast-selling styles for men and women, for dress, work, sport. Rush name and address for FREE SAMPLE CATALOG and Tested Sales Plans. VICTOR THOMAS SHOE CO., Dept. V-67, 610 W. Van Buren St., Chicago, Ill.

**FREE**  
SALES KIT

## Old? Get Pep, Vim with Iron, Calcium, Vitamin B,

**MEN. WOMEN.** of 40, 50, 60. Don't be old, weak, worn-out, exhausted. Take Oestrex. Contains tonic, stimulants often needed after 40—by bodies lacking Iron, Calcium, Vitamin B. Thousands bow feel peppy, years younger. Get Oestrex Tonic Tablets TODAY. Trial size 35c. OR SAVE MONEY—get regular \$1. size (4 times as many tablets). Also ask about money-saving "Economy" size. At all drugstores.

ing, then he slipped through it and for a long minute lay without moving just on the other side.

He hadn't brought his rifle. He had only his knife. A rifle would be in the way as he tried to slip silently through the high grass just ahead. Jim drew his knife and stretched out on his stomach. Slowly, inch by inch, he edged forward, hugging the ground. After a time he lifted his head and looked back. He was still so close to the enclosure that he could hear the murmur of voices from within it.

Fires ringed the enclosure, excepting along the river. The river bank, Jim knew, would be closely watched by prowling braves. They knew the pattern of affairs like this. They had caught one man attempting to get away. They would be on the watch for others.



JIM didn't head for the river. He circled toward the west, still moving with an infinite caution. This knee-high grass which hid him could as easily hide a score of Indians who might have crept close to the camp. Jim was thankful for the superstition which held them back from a night attack. Under a night attack, the wagon train would have had no chance at all.

A rustling noise lifted from the grass just ahead. Every muscle in Jim's body went rigid. He breathed carefully through his open mouth. The noise came again, then stopped, then reached him once more. Through the grass, probably not more than an arm's length away, one of the painted red warriors was approaching. Jim didn't move until he was sure the Indian was well beyond him. In a surprise attack he might have been able to handle that brave, but the noise of the encounter would have drawn others.

It was hard to curb the impatience which gnawed at him. Jim wanted to jerk to his feet and run and trust to the darkness and his speed to get away. It might come to that, of course, but this other was the better way. Each five minutes carried him farther away from the enclosure and farther through the land being so carefully watched by the Indians.

## STRING OUT—FOR HELL!

Now and then Jim would lift his head and take a quick look from side to side. He was getting close to the circling fires and against their glow he could make out the ever-moving figures of the warriors, hideously painted and almost naked. He could no longer see the wagons.

Jim charted a course midway between two of the fires and angled that way. He came to a bare space of ground, stared across it and after a moment's indecision started for the other side on hands and knees. Just as he got there, three Indians circling from one fire to another caught sight of him. He heard their shouts of alarm, saw them charging in toward him. He came to his feet as the first brave reached him. A quick slash of his knife caught the warrior in the shoulder and Jim lunged past him toward the second. His arm warded off the thrust of a spear and once more his knife slashed upward. This was fast, close work, and an instant's error in timing would have spelled disaster.

The third Indian had stopped and fitted an arrow to a bow. Jim felt the cut of it as it scraped his cheek. From the direction of both fires, now, other braves were coming. The night was hideous with their yells. They were hearing this in the encampment, Jim thought, and were marking it down as his requiem. He smiled grimly to himself.

For that's what it was, Jim knew. He made no attempt to reach the third Indian but, twisting away, started racing for the river. Another arrow whistled past his head. Jim twisted a little to the left. The ground was uneven and the heavy grass caught at his legs. He had never run so hard in his life. He could hear the pounding of feet behind him. The silver stream of the Platte looked awfully far away.

Then something tripped him and he went down, but rolled over and came to his feet and went on running. He reached the river. It wasn't deep here and he splashed across it and started along the far bank. Before ducking into a grove of trees, he took a quick look over his shoulder. Several Indians had caught up their horses and were riding after him. He might have out-run those on foot, but

**12  
WEEKS  
SHOP  
TRAINING**

**Prepare for a GOOD War-Time Job**  

# in ELECTRICITY

  
*...with a REAL Peace-Time Future!*

**LOOK AHEAD!** Why take a narrow, no-future job, when you can be doing **VITZ** was work and preparing to meet the big competition for jobs **AFTER THE WAR**.

**UNLIMITED OPPORTUNITIES**  
**—NOW AND IN PEACETIME**  
 Trained electricians are urgently needed NOW. And when Victory comes, amazing new opportunities will be waiting. Thousands of future jobs are being created by war-time discoveries in Electronics, Aviation Electricity, Air Conditioning, Power Plants, etc. You learn them all at Coyne, America's greatest "Learn by Doing" Electrical School!

**MEN! WHETHER YOU ARE 16 OR UP TO 50, GET MY BOOK!**  
 Coyne training is EASY, PRACTICAL. Train on real electrical equipment, not by correspondence. Covers every branch of Electricity. Don't let age, lack of education or experience hold you back. You don't need much money—get my training first, pay for it in easy monthly payments after graduation. I'll even help you get part-time work to help with living expenses. Lifetime Employment Service to graduates. Coyne is 44 years old—known everywhere. Mail coupon today for his FREE book!

**H. C. LEWIS, President**  
**COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL**  
 590 S. Paulina St., Dept. 43-76, Chicago, Ill.

Send FREE Coyne Book and tell me about your plans to help me get a good war-time job with a peacetime future.

NAME.....  
 ADDRESS.....  
 CITY..... STATE.....



*H. C. Lewis*

## don't WORRY

**ABOUT RUPTURE**

Why put up with years of needless discomfort and worry? Try a Brooks Automatic Air Cushion. This marvelous appliance permits the opening to close, yet holds reducible rupture securely, comfortably—day and night. Thousands report amazing results. Light, neat-fitting. No hard pads or stiff springs to chafe or gouge. Made for men, women and children. Durable, cheap, **Sent on trial to prove it.** Never sold in stores. Beware of imitations. Write for Free Book on Rupture, no-risk trial order plan, and proof of results. All correspondence confidential.

**BROOKS COMPANY, 159-F State St., Marshall, Mich.**



**DO YOU RECOGNIZE  
ONE OF THESE SIGNS?**



**IF YOU DO**, you are ready to know their true secret meaning in the divine or Cosmic world. A new private and Sealed Book will be sent to you without cost, explaining how the ancient sages used these signs as keys to unlock the forces of the universe. Just state which sign you recognize and address your letter to:

Scribe F.S.P.  
**The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC)**  
 San Jose, California

# Acid Indigestion

**Relieved in 5 Minutes or  
Double Your Money Back**

When excess stomach acid causes painful, suffocating gas, sour stomach and heartburn, doctors usually prescribe the fastest-acting medicines known for symptomatic relief—medicines like those in Bell-ans Tablets. No laxative. Bell-ans brings comfort in a jiffy or double your money back on return of bottle to us. 25¢ everywhere.

## SUPER JU JITSU



**NOW GET TOUGH  
DOUBLE-QUICK!**

Learn how YOU can be dangerous. Lick brutes twice your size *with only your hands*, even when they are armed. This powerful fighting system is unbelievably efficient. You don't need ox-like muscles—it's brains that count! New, easy self-study course at amazing low price. Free-trial offer and money-back guarantee. **Hurry! Write today for FREE DETAILS.** Nelson Co., 500 Sherman, Dept. D-515, Chicago.

## MAKE MORE MONEY

**taking Orders for The NIMROD Line**

Earn more every day in the year representing old established firm with a complete line of fast selling necessities: Shirts of all kinds, Ties, Underwear, Hosiery, Suspenders, Jackets, Pants, Slacks, Ensembles, Shoes, Sportswear, Uniforms, etc. Every item guaranteed. Experience unnecessary.

Write quick for **FREE SALES EQUIPMENT.** NIMROD COMPANY  
4922-NW Lincoln Ave., Chicago, Ill.



**for UNUSED U.S. STAMPS**

WANTED at 90% FACE VALUE. M. O. sent on receipt. Send stamps Registered Mail. Square Trading (Dept. M-8), 439-5th Ave., N. Y. C.

## ELECTRIC BOOKS

3 Big  
Volumes  
1200  
Pages

**Earn More Money. Know  
Your Job Better. Serve  
Your Country. Get this...**



**AMAZING 3 VOLUME  
ELECTRICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA  
FREE 7 DAY TRIAL**

**AUTHORITATIVE. Practical**—prepared by experts. Used regularly on the job by hundreds of electricians, service men, radio men, air cadets, students, maintenance men, etc. **EASY, COMPLETE.** Covers everything Electrical: Armature winding, A. C. & D. C. Motors, generators, electronics, automotive electricity, refrigeration, etc., etc. Answers your electrical questions quickly, clearly, completely. Also includes Radio, Television.

### SEE THEN RISK FREE

You don't have to risk a penny. To get your set promptly, just mail coupon. Examine books 7 days risk free. Mail coupon now. **LIMITED OFFER.**

### FREE WITH ENCYCLOPEDIA

One year of personal technical advice from our staff of instructors—on any Electrical or Radio subject. ACT NOW and we'll include Certificate entitling you to Technical Service by mail for one year after you purchase encyclopedia.

H. C. LEWIS, Pres., COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL  
800 South Paulina Street, Dept. 43-87, Chicago, Ill.  
Send me the big Coyne Electrical Reference and Instruction Encyclopedia. Within 7 days after receiving the books, I'll either return them or send you \$5, and \$1 a month until advertised price of \$12.00 is paid. We pay the shipping charges.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

OCCUPATION \_\_\_\_\_

AGE \_\_\_\_\_

## 10 STORY WESTERN MAGAZINE

against these ponies he had no chance at all.

On the fringe of the grove, Jim Holden stopped. His leg muscles were quivering from the strain of the dash he had made and he was short of breath. Sweat streaked down his face and plastered his shirt to his body. He pressed up against one of the trees in the grove. Eight mounted Indians raced past. Indians afoot followed and they moved more cautiously through the grove. Why he wasn't seen, Jim didn't know.

The sound of the chase passed beyond him but Jim knew that it wasn't for long. The Indians would soon realize that he wasn't ahead and would turn back. They would search this ground inch by inch. He could find no hiding place that they wouldn't discover.

Another mounted Indian came splashing across the river. He was joined on this side by several who were afoot, and Jim could hear the sounds of their talk. After a minute the mounted Indian rode for the grove and about a dozen yards from where Jim was standing he stopped his horse and leaned forward as though listening.

Jim eyed the man's horse desperately. With a horse, he might yet escape and reach the company ahead. He considered dashing toward the Indian and taking a chance on pulling the fellow to the ground, but this warrior carried a spear. Jim would never be able to reach him.

The Indian rode on a little way and then stopped again. Then Jim took the only chance he had. He staggered away from the tree, groaned and dropped to his knees as though badly wounded. The Indian saw him almost at once and gave a triumphant shout. He wheeled his horse and came back to where Jim was kneeling. His spear lifted over his head but the warrior didn't hurl it. Instead, he slid from the back of his horse and sprang toward what looked like a helpless captive.

JIM HOLDEN came abruptly to his feet. He tried to ward off a hurried thrust of the Indian's spear but he wasn't in time. It caught him in the shoul-

## STRING OUT—FOR HELL!

der, driving a hot, sharp pain into his body. Another scream of triumph tore from the Indian's throat, but it was the last sound he uttered, for the shaft of the spear broke off and Jim lurched straight at the man, slashing desperately with his knife. He caught the warrior across the throat and saw him stagger back and drop to the ground.

Jim wasn't conscious of reaching the Indian's horse, or of pulling himself astride, but after a minute he realized that he was mounted and racing away. Behind him, and on either side, were yelling, screaming warriors, many of them mounted. Jim dropped his knife and with both hands clung to the horse's heavy mane. The pain in his shoulder made him dizzy. Blood soaked his entire side. He gave the horse its head and let it run and some time later realized that the sounds of pursuit were all behind him.

He was still being followed but he was away. All he had to do now was keep ahead of the warriors who trailed him. Keep ahead of them until he reached the next outfit somewhere up the trail. . . .

Dawn came and the sun swept up behind him. It climbed high into the sky and sank toward the horizon. Jim's horse was lame now and could no longer be urged to a gallop. But some time after noon the Indians who had clung to his trail all night gave up the pursuit. Or at least they had dropped so far behind that Jim could no longer see them.

How far he had come he didn't know, but he was afraid that the horse would never make the next wagon. Jim wasn't even sure that he could last. At times the wound in his shoulder would clot up and stop bleeding, then a jolt would open it again.

He felt very hot; he was running a fever. He wanted to stop for a drink. He needed one terribly. But he was afraid that if he once dismounted he would never be able to get back on the horse again.

Darkness came, but tonight it was a star-studded darkness with a half moon in the sky. Jim still kept along the river, for the trail here followed it a long way. He dozed off and awoke to find the horse standing still. Jabbing it with his heels, he tried to get it started again, but the



### TRAIN AT HOME FOR TOP PAY JOBS

Your opportunity is here. Radio Technicians needed everywhere—added in action and at home in industry. National Schools offer tested home training method—an actual extension of the home study and training you would receive if you attended school in person. Shop method plan. Experimental radio equipment, parts and tools—included at no extra cost. GET STARTED, BUILD THE FUTURE, TODAY.

#### FREE LESSON AND BOOK

Send Coupon for full details. Free Complimentary Demonstration Lesson and Big Book of Facts. ACT . . . INVESTIGATE . . . NO COST!

### TRAIN QUICKLY

for service as Radio Technician in Uncle Sam's Forces or in Civilian Industries: Radio Export, Broadcasting, Aircraft, Marine, Industrial Electronic, Studio Technician, Remanufacture and other attractive jobs.

## NATIONAL SCHOOLS

LOS ANGELES, CALIF. (Est. 1905)

### MAIL OPPORTUNITY COUPON FOR QUICK ACTION

National Schools, Dept. PP-4

4000 S. Figueroa, Los Angeles, Calif.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ AGE: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## KEY TO A PRACTICAL UNDERSTANDING OF ELECTRICITY

\$1 PER MO.

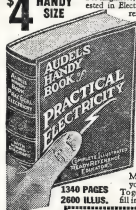
### • AUDELS HANDY BOOK OF ELECTRICITY

\$4 HANDY SIZE

For Engineers, Electricians, Students and all interested in Electricity. A quick, simplified, ready reference, giving complete instruction and practical information. Easy to understand. A reliable authority and a handy helper that answers your questions.

#### INSIDE TRADE INFORMATION ON

The Rules and Laws of Electricity—Maintenance of Machinery—A. C. and D. C. Motors—Armature Winding and Repair—Wiring Diagrams—House Lighting—Power Wiring—Cable Splicing—Motors—Batteries—Transformers—Elevators—Electric Cranes—Railways—Bells—Sign Flashers—Telephone—Ignition—Radio Principles—Refrigeration—Air Conditioning—Oil Burners—Air Compressors—Welding, and many Modern Applications explained so you can understand.



1340 PAGES  
2600 ILLUS.

To get this assistance for yourself, simply fill in and mail the FREE COUPON below.

THEO. AUDELS & CO., 49 West 23rd Street, New York  
Please send me "Audels Handy Book of Practical Electricity" for free examination. If satisfactory, I will send you \$1 in 7 days, then \$1 monthly until \$4 is paid. Otherwise I will return it.



READ FOR PROFIT!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reference: \_\_\_\_\_ PER



# Classified Advertising

"Small ads" pay large returns. This magazine is just one of a large group of fiction magazines read by millions of people. Write to this magazine at 205 East 43rd Street, New York City, for list and advertising rates covering complete group.

## Antiques—Indian Relics

Indian Relics, Coins, Curios, Catalog 5c. VERNON LEMLEY, OSBORNE, KANSAS.

## Educational

CORRESPONDENCE COURSES and self-instruction books, slightly used. Sold, Rented, Exchanged. All subjects. Satisfaction guaranteed. Cash paid for used courses. Complete details and 84-page illustrated bargain catalog FREE. Write Nelson Company, 500 Sherman, Dept. D-218, Chicago.

## Female Help Wanted

WOMEN—EARN TO \$23 WEEKLY taking orders in home for dresses \$2.39. Just one of 140 wonderful values. No investment. Give age, dress size. FASHION FROCKS, Desk 54029, Cincinnati, Ohio.

## For Inventors

PATENTS SECURED. Low cost. Book and advice free. L. F. Randolph, Dept. 573, Washington, D. C.

## Nurses Training School

MAKE UP TO \$25 — \$35 WEEK as a trained practical nurse! Learn quickly at home. Booklet Free. Chicago School of Nursing, Dept. D-3, Chicago.

## Old Money Wanted

We purchase all Indianhead pennies. Complete catalogue 10c. Waltman, 398 Broadway, New York.

## Patent Attorneys

INVENTORS: Learn now—without obligation—how to protect and sell your invention. Secure "Patent Guide"—Free. Write—CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN & HARVEY JACOBSON, 326-D Adams Building, Washington, D. C.

## Patents

INVENTORS—PATENT YOUR INVENTION. Secure book, "Protect, Finance and Sell Your Invention." No obligation. McMORROW AND BERMAN, Registered Patent Attorneys, 150-M Albee Building, Washington, D. C.

## Photo Finishing

ROLLS DEVELOPED—25c coin. Two 5 x 7 Double Weight Professional Enlargements, 8 Gloss Deckle Edge Prints. CLUB PHOTO SERVICE, Dept. 16, La Crosse, Wis.

## Poems—Songwriters

WANTED — Poems for musical setting. Submit for consideration. Phonograph transcriptions made. Rhyming pamphlet FREE. Keenan's Studio, P. Box 2140, Bridgeport, Conn.

SONGS—SONG POEMS WANTED. NO CHARGE for melodies. Marketing service. Hollywood Recording Studios, 87D25 Preuss St., Los Angeles.

SONGWRITERS: Send poem for immediate consideration and FREE Rhyming Dictionary. RICHARD BROTHERS, 30 Woods Building, Chicago.

SONG POEMS WANTED. Free examination. Send poems. McNeil, Master of Music, 510-A South Alexandria, Los Angeles, Calif.

SONGWRITERS—Write for free booklet. Profit Sharing Plan. Allied Songs, 204 East Fourth, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Poems set to music by HIT WRITER! SONG SERVICE, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York.

POEMS WANTED FOR MUSICAL SETTING. Five Star Music Masters, 620 Beacon Building, Boston.

POEMS WANTED—Exceptional Opportunity. Song Studios, 2905 East 76th, Chicago.

SONGWRITERS: Send poems for offer and FREE Rhyming Dictionary. Phonograph records made. Vanderbilt Studios, Box 112-FZ, Coney Island, N. Y.

## 10 STORY WESTERN MAGAZINE

front legs of the horse folded up and Jim was spilled to the ground. He got up and staggered on ahead. After a long time he saw a pin-point of light in the distance. He started running, and shouting. Twice he fell and twice he got up. The light didn't ever seem to get any closer and when he fell again he didn't have the strength to get back on his feet. Even the will to rise seemed to have left him, in his exhausted, dazed condition.

Someone rode up through the darkness and dropped to the ground at his side. Jim thought that one of the Indians had finally caught him. He tried to strike back at the hands that grabbed him.

"Here, there, young fella," a heavy voice said. "Take it easy, will you? It looks like you've had a hard time."

Through his fogging consciousness, Jim recognized that voice. It belonged to Sam Shem, scout for the wagon train ahead. In hurried sentences he gasped out his story. "I've gotta go back with you," he finished. "I've gotta—"

"We'll see about that, Jim," the old scout answered. "Right now what you need is a pack of rest."

\* \* \*

When Jim awoke it was daylight, and a girl with soft brown hair was bending over him, adjusting the bandage on his shoulder. When she saw that Jim was awake she tried to get him to take gruel out of a cup. Jim pushed the cup aside. He made an effort to sit up but the girl pushed him back.

"You're not to worry about your people," she told him. "Most of the men in this company set out to help them within a few minutes of the time Sam Shem brought you here. Now take it easy or I'll have to tie you down."

"I've got to go back there," Jim muttered. "I said I would."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," the girl answered.

Jim made another effort to get up but the girl wouldn't let him and in the end Jim took the food she offered and then closed his eyes and slept. . . .

It was another day and Sam Shem was sitting beside him when he next opened



## STRING OUT—FOR HELL!

his eyes. The old scout grinned at him. "I come on back ahead of the others, just to talk to you," he declared. "I reckoned Susy Blake might be havin' trouble, though I can't understand it. Susy's a right nice girl."

"You got there in time?" Jim asked.

"Well, in time to kill a few varmints an' save maybe half of the men in your company. You know, son, they put up a real good fight."

"I've gotta go back there," Jim said stubbornly.

"An' get yourself hung?"

"I said I'd go back."

Sam Shem chuckled. "Nope, you can wait here, Jim. What's left of them are gonna join up with us an' you can help me do the scoutin'. An' you might as well quit your worryin'. It seems like you didn't kill that fellow Landover. A man named McArdle killed him, an' 'fessed up after he got an' Injun arrow through the chest an' thought he was dyin'. He was sweet on McArdle's wife an' had an eye on the McArdle wagons. The reason that woman said you had killed her husband was that McArdle told her it was you. You see, she wasn't in her own wagon that night but she didn't dare admit it. She 'fessed up, too, afore she died."

Jim sucked in a long, haggard breath. "Then—I don't have to go back to the train?"

"Nope, an' treat Susy decent, will you? She's right nice, an' danged if I know what she sees in you, but I think she plans on ropin' a husband before she gets to Oregon, an' maybe you're it."

Still chuckling, Sam Shem left. Jim closed his eyes. He tried not to think of McArdle or Ann Landover. He tried to look ahead. It would be nice working with Sam Shem. There was no finer scout along the trail. And as for Susy. . . .

Jim Holden looked up. Susy Blake had taken Sam Shem's place. She had blue eyes. Funny, but he had never noticed them before. She had a nice smile, too. Jim had a notion that he was flushing. He said, "Hello, Susy," and then grinned and closed his eyes and went to sleep.

## \$100 MONTHLY FOR SICKNESS AND ACCIDENTS

**Plus Hospital Benefits--Pays Up  
To \$1,000 If Killed!**

We have just issued a NEW sickness—accident—hospital policy that costs as little as 3c a day!

It pays up to \$100 a month for disability from sickness or accident—and hospital benefits in addition!

It pays your beneficiary up to \$1,000 if you are killed.

And *most important*—It covers ALL accidents from the very first day . . . ALL sickness from the very first day, except those specifically excluded in the policy. No waiting period of 7 or 14 days, as so many policies require.

It has other benefits—you will see them all for *yourself* when you send for a regular policy on FREE inspection without obligation. You can judge this important value for yourself!

Postal now is offering this protection, if desired, on a monthly payment plan of only \$1.00 a month—or on quarterly, semi-annual or annual payments.

**BUT SEND NO MONEY.** Write for policy on free inspection. No agents will call—no medical examination.

*Don't delay—write today!* Send full name, address, age, occupation, and name of beneficiary to Postal Life & Casualty Insurance Company, 5000 Postal Life Building, Kansas City, Mo.

### MOTORISTS Wanted!

**TO MAKE THIS UNIQUE  
GAS SAVING TEST**



Will you permit us to send you at our risk the **Vacu-matic**, a device which auto owners everywhere are praising? Install it on your car. Test it at our risk. Unless it trims dollars off your gas bills by saving up to 30% on gasoline consumption, gives more power, quicker pickup and faster acceleration, the test will cost you nothing.

**Automatic Supercharge Principle**  
**Vacu-matic is entirely different!** It operates on the supercharge principle by automatically adding a charge of extra oxygen, drawn free from the outer air into the heart of the gas mixture. It is entirely automatic and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, speed and volume as required. Saves up to 30% on gas costs, with better motor performance.

**FITS ALL CARS**  
Constructed of experts fused into a single unit, adjusted and sealed at the factory. Easy and quick to install by anyone in a few minutes.

**AGENTS Get Yours FREE**  
**FOR INTRODUCING.** Here's a splendid opportunity for annual sales and profits. Every car, truck, tractor owner a prospect. Send name and address now for big money making offer and how you can get yours free.

**The Vacu-matic Co., 7617-7617 W. State Street, Wauwatosa, Wis.**

# YOU CAN STILL ENLIST IN THIS ARMY



ONE great American army is still open for enlistments! It's the all-important army of *trained men* — whose *specialized knowledge* and skill are helping to win the war *today*, and will play a vital role in the victory world of *tomorrow*!

You still have time to join these "industrial rangers." Even if you're over 38 — or over 50! — training will make you a better fighter on the production front, and will fit you for a better job when peace comes.

You can get your training as thousands of business and industrial leaders got theirs — by studying a low-cost I. C. S. Course in your spare time, at home! 400 business and technical subjects to choose from — one, or a combination of several, will fit you for greater success.

Mail this coupon for complete information on I.C.S. textbooks, teaching methods and personalized instruction.

## INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

HELPING TO TRAIN AMERICANS FOR VICTORY

BOX 3280-1, SCRANTON, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me booklet and full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X:

### TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- |                                                                              |                                                                       |                                                                                 |                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Air Brake                                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Contracting and Building                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Management of Inventions                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Sanitary Engineering                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Air Conditioning                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Cotton Manufacturing                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Marine Engines                                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet Metal Work                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Airplane Drafting                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Diesel Engines                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Drafting                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Ship Drafting                                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Drafting                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Drafting                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineering                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Shipbuilding <input type="checkbox"/> Shop Practices  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture                                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineering                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Mine Foreman                                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Electric <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engines |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Engine Tune-up                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrician                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Navigation <input type="checkbox"/> Patternmaking      | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Fitting                                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Technician                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Lighting                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Plastics <input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing             | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Drafting                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aviation <input type="checkbox"/> Aviation Mechanic | <input type="checkbox"/> Foundryman <input type="checkbox"/> Heating  | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Works Engineering                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineering                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blueprint Reading                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Heat Treatment of Metals                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Pulp and Paper Making                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Boilermaking                                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Highway Engineering                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio, General                                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegraphy <input type="checkbox"/> Telephony         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge Engineering                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Home Planning                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Operating                                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Textile Designing                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry <input type="checkbox"/> Coal Mining      | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Metallurgy                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Servicing                                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Toolmaking <input type="checkbox"/> Tool Design       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineering                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Locomotive Engineer                          | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Section Foreman                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Welding, Gas and Electric                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete Engineering                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Machinist <input type="checkbox"/> Inspector | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Signalman <input type="checkbox"/> Refrigeration | <input type="checkbox"/> Woolen Manufacturing                                  |

### BUSINESS COURSES

- |                                                  |                                          |                                                  |                                                                      |                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting              | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising     | <input type="checkbox"/> College Preparatory     | <input type="checkbox"/> First Year College                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Postal Clerk                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping             | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial      | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Illustrating | <input type="checkbox"/> Foremanship <input type="checkbox"/> French | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence | <input type="checkbox"/> Cost Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> C. P. Accounting        | <input type="checkbox"/> Good English                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Secretarial <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management     | <input type="checkbox"/> High School     | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing Men at Work    | <input type="checkbox"/> High School                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Showcard and Sign Lettering                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning              | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service   |                                                  |                                                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management                           |

### HOME ECONOMICS COURSES

- |                                               |                                                                 |                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Dressmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Home Dressmaking                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foods and Cookery    | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Dressmaking and Designing |                                                                      |

Name..... Age..... Address.....

City..... State..... Present Position.....

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada  
British residents send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingsway, London, W. C. 2, England

SPECIAL  
TUITION RATES  
FOR MEMBERS  
OF THE  
ARMED FORCES  
★

# FREE 7-DAY OFFER!

# AUTOMECHANICS..

## FLEET OWNERS... SERVICE STATIONS... REPAIR SHOPS

### NOW REPAIR ANY MAKE CAR

### Save Repair Time—Handle More Jobs—Make More Money!

**MoToR's Famous FACTORY SHOP MANUAL Gives You ALL Service, Repair, Tune-Up, Adjustment, Replacement Facts on Every Car Built Since 1935!**

HERE'S every repair fact you need to know about ANY make car that comes into your shop—new 1942 or 8-year-old jalopy! Nearly 200,000 quick-indexed "how-to-do-it" service and repair facts; tune-up and adjustment data; tables of measurements, clearances, specifications. Clear, step-by-step language. Nearly 1,000 drawings, diagrams, cut-away pictures that make every instruction easy as A-B-C. 600 pages, size 8½x11 inches.

Cars today need quicker service. No more new models—repair jobs will be tougher. War plants making mechanics scarce—more work and more money for YOU, if you can handle it.

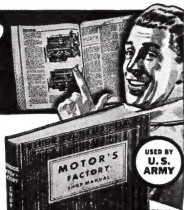
That's why you need this famous FACTORY SHOP MANUAL now, and that's why we want you to examine it first, at our risk!

### Like 150 Factory Manuals in One!

MoToR's Factory Shop Manual gives you all the "dope" from 150 manufacturers' official manuals—all in one handy book! Just look up the job, the model, the make, and go to work. Special binding keeps book open at any page, for "work-while-you-read."

This same Factory Shop Manual is the one used by U. S. Army, trade and technical schools the country over, auto servicemen everywhere. Makes a good mechanic an expert—saves experts valuable time, trouble, money! Right NOW—to see how this book can help you get at each job easier, do it better, finish it up faster—send coupon below for a FREE examination copy of MoToR's Factory Shop Manual. You don't have to pay a nickel if you're not satisfied with it!

[Published by MoToR, The Leading Automotive Business Magazine]



### Clear, Pictured, Step-by-Step Instructions Covering Every Job on Every Car Built Since 1935!

Nearly 200,000 service and repair facts on all makes. 600 pages, with over 50 pages of text, charts, illustrations covering all models of cars.

Over 450 charts, tables covering important specifications, clearances, measurements, arranged in handy form, including: TUNE-UP CHART; VALVE MEASUREMENTS; COMPRESSION PRESSURE; TORQUE WRENCH READING; STARTING MOTOR; ENGINE CLEARANCE; MAIN & ROD BEARING JOURNAL DIMENSIONS; GENERATOR; CLUTCH & BRAKE SPECIFICATIONS; FRONT END MEASUREMENTS, etc., etc.

Detailed, pictured instructions on ENGINES; ELECTRIC SYSTEMS; FUEL SYSTEMS; COOLING SYSTEMS; LUBRICATING SYSTEMS; TRANSMISSIONS; WHEELS; FRONT ENDS; KNEE ACTION; SHOCK ABSORBERS; SPRING; RODS; FREE WHEEL; UNIVERSALS; REAR ENDS, etc., etc.

### Same FREE 7-Day Offer Applies on MoToR's New TRUCK REPAIR MANUAL!

For all mechanics regardless of experience! For truck specialists, truck service stations, fleet owners. Covers EVERY job on EVERY truck made since 1935! Contains 1400 pictures, 900 pages, 300,000 facts based on manufacturers' own official manuals. All ready in use by Armed Forces, and truck service men. Warranted to contain every essential fact you need to know. Waterproof binding, size 8½x11.

Covers all types of Gasoline Engines; all types of Diesel and Diesels. All types of Diesel Fuel Injection Systems. All procedures described in easily-understood text and clear pictures: Fuel Systems, Governors, Lubrication Systems, Ignition Systems, Starters, Generators, Clutches, Transmissions, Axles, Torque Dividers, Transfer Cases, Brakes, Steering, etc., etc.

Ordered on same FREE 7-day examination as Factory Shop Manual. Check box in coupon at right.



### SEND NO MONEY

#### Mail Coupon

See for yourself how the Manual pays for itself the first few days you use it! And if not satisfied, return book without cost or obligation. Send coupon TODAY! MoToR Book Dept. 284, 572 Madison Ave., New York, N. Y.

### FREE 7-DAY TRIAL

MoToR Book Dept., Desk 284, 572 Madison Ave., New York, N. Y.

Rush to me at once: (check box opposite book you want).

☐ MoToR's FACTORY SHOP MANUAL. If O.K. I will remit \$1 in 7 days, and \$1 monthly for 4 months, plus 35c delivery charge with final payment (\$5.35 in all). Otherwise I will return book in 7 days. (Foreign, \$6, cash with order.)

☐ MoToR's TRUCK REPAIR MANUAL. (Described at left). If O.K., I will remit \$2 in 7 days, and \$2 monthly for 2 months, plus 35c delivery charge with final payment (\$8.35 in all). Otherwise I will return book in 7 days. (Foreign, \$10, cash with order.)

Name.....Age.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Employer.....

☐ SAVE 35c Check here if mechanic present. We will then pay delivery charge. Same return privileges.

# This is the Mayor



## of BLUE RIBBON TOWN

*... Who said to his neighbors: "Come on and ride down"*

"YOU know," said Mayor Peters,  
"I'm thanking my stars,  
That people have taken  
to sharing their cars,  
For somehow the spirit  
of helping a fellow  
Has made all the neighbors  
more friendly, more mellow."

"WE frequently stop on the way  
back from town  
At the home of a Smith or a  
Jones or a Brown,  
And top off the day with a  
bottle of Pabst,  
Formality, stiffness—  
completely collapsed.

"NOW frankly, there's nothing  
so nice and befriending  
As Blue Ribbon Beer with its  
full-flavor blending—  
That softer and kindlier taste,  
Pabst obtains,  
By blending it just like the  
finest champagnes."



© 1942, Pabst Brewing Company, Milwaukee, Wisconsin



Now more than ever—  
*A Symbol of  
Friendly Companionship*

Now that wartime has brought a return to simple pleasures in Blue Ribbon Town (your town—everybody's town), Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer has become, more than ever, the symbol of friendly companionship. Enjoy that softer, kindlier taste—obtained by the **FULL-FLAVOR BLENDING** of 33 master brews.

Pabst is blended like fine champagnes—to give you *all* the delicious taste tones of a well-rounded beer. There is no finer beer in all the world than Pabst Blue Ribbon.

### 33 FINE BREWS BLENDED into One Great Beer

In standard 12 ounce and full quart size bottles.  
Also on draught at better places everywhere.